

**The Theology of the Gospel of Mark**  
**A Literary-Theological Investigation into the Presentation**  
**of God in the Second Gospel**

C. Drew Smith

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The University of Edinburgh  
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I, C. Drew Smith, hereby declare that I have composed the following thesis and that it is my own work.

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## Abstract

Almost three decades past, Nils A. Dahl called attention to the lack of scholarship devoted to the study of God in the New Testament and in earliest Christianity, dubbing it the “neglected factor”. Since Dahl’s remark, a handful of studies have been devoted to filling this void. Yet there has been little concentration on the study of God in the Gospel of Mark. It remains a neglected factor.

In light of this, the present thesis seeks to contribute to the filling of the void by addressing the role that God plays in the narrative of the second Gospel. The thesis utilises the methods of modern literary criticism, particularly those used to discuss the presentation of characters in narrative. While the application of literary criticism, and the study of characterisation, are not new in the study of Mark’s story, these methods have not been fully applied in the study of God in the Gospel. By using literary criticism, this thesis extracts and describes the presentation of God in the narrative. While there are specific references to God in the Gospel, and while God also speaks in the narrative, this study broadens the scope of the investigation through a close reading of the text to determine not only explicit but also implicit references to God.

Following the introductory chapter, chapters two and three offer a close reading of the Markan narrative with the specific purpose of showing where and how God is presented in and through the Gospel. The aim of these two chapters is to demonstrate how the narrator or characters within the story present God. These chapters will serve as the foundation for ensuing discussions of Markan Christology and discipleship.

In chapter four, my attention focuses on the presentation of Jesus; Mark’s Christology. My concern in this chapter is with the way Jesus is presented through the narrator’s *telling* who Jesus is through Christological titles, and the way Jesus is presented through the narrator’s *showing* who Jesus is via the narration of Jesus’ actions and words. The aim of this chapter is to argue that the Markan Jesus is better understood in relation to the Markan presentation of God, and thus the Christology of Mark is better understood as an aspect of the theology of Mark.

In chapter five I address the Gospel’s definition of discipleship. The concern of this chapter is not primarily with the presentation of the twelve, but with the presentation of discipleship as an aspect of the presentation of God. I argue that the discipleship community of Mark’s narrative, i.e. the authorial audience, is drawn by the narrative to understand their lives of discipleship in relation not only to Jesus, but also, and primarily, in relation to the God of Jesus and Mark’s narrative.

Chapter six closes the thesis by summarizing the presentation of God in Mark. This concluding chapter also offers an understanding of how a first-century audience might respond to the Gospel’s presentation of God.

This thesis demonstrates that 1) God plays a crucial and active role in the narrative; 2) Mark’s Christology and view of discipleship are better understood as aspects of the presentation of God; and 3) the presentation of God in Mark may serve as the fundamental purpose of Mark’s Gospel.

# Contents

## Abbreviations

vii

<b>Chapter 1: The Neglected God of the Gospel of Mark</b>	<b>1</b>
Introduction	1
Minor Progress in the Study of God in Mark	3
Mark: Christological or Theological Narrative?	5
Literary Criticism and the Gospels	8
“Let the Reader Understand”: Ways of Reading/ Hearing Mark	13
“But what if the readers were listening?”	18
Hearing the Gospel of Mark in the First Century	21
Hearing God in/through the Narrative: Characterization in Literature	23
<i>The Significance of God as Character</i>	23
<i>Locating the Presentation of God in Mark</i>	25
The Prospects of this Investigation	28
 <b>Chapter 2: The Presentation of God in Mark 1:1-9:1</b>	 <b>30</b>
 <b>Chapter 3: The Presentation of God in Mark 9:2-16:8</b>	 <b>72</b>
 <b>Chapter 4: “This is my Beloved Son”</b>	 <b>148</b>
<b>Mark’s Christology as an Aspect of Mark’s Theology</b>	
Introduction	148
Narrative Analysis of Mark’s Presentation of Jesus	151
The Presentation of Jesus through Christological Titles	152
<i>υἱὸς θεου</i>	153
<i>χριστός</i>	160
<i>κύριος</i>	164
<i>ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ</i>	167
<i>ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου</i>	169
<i>υἱὸς Δαβὶδ</i>	174
Summary	177
The Narrative Presentation of Jesus	177
Jesus as the One Sent from God	178
Jesus as Actor for God	184
<i>Jesus’ Miracles and God’s Authority</i>	186
<i>Jesus’ Miracles and God’s Defeat of God’s Enemies</i>	188
<i>Jesus’ Miracles and God’s Cleansing from Impurity</i>	191

<i>Jesus' Miracles and God's Compassion and Comfort</i>	193
<i>Jesus' Miracles and God's Judgment</i>	196
<i>Jesus' Miracles and God's Numinous Presence</i>	196
Jesus as Speaker for God	201
<i>Jesus Speaks with Authority from God</i>	202
<i>Jesus Speaks concerning the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of God</i>	206
<i>Jesus Speaks about Himself as Envoy of God</i>	207
Jesus' Death as an Act for God	213
<i>The Ransom Saying</i>	213
<i>The Passover Meal Saying</i>	216
Jesus' Vindication and Exaltation as an Act of God	218
Mark's Christology as an Aspect of Mark's Theology	220
 <b>Chapter 5: "Whoever does the will of God"</b>	 <b>224</b>
<b>Theology and Discipleship in Mark</b>	
Introduction	224
The Ambiguous Role of the Disciples in Mark	227
Current Debate over the Disciples in Mark	228
The Disciples in Mark: Portraits of Reality	232
Jesus as the Paradigmatic Disciple in Mark	234
<i>The Plot of Mark and the Narrative Jesus as the Paradigm of Discipleship</i>	234
<i>The Faith of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark</i>	239
<i>Jesus the Human One in Mark</i>	242
<i>Jesus and the Disciples: Co-workers in the Kingdom of God</i>	245
Theology and Discipleship in Mark	248
<i>The Discipleship Community in Relationship with God</i>	249
<i>The Discipleship Community and Faith in God</i>	259
<i>The Discipleship Community and the Proclamation of the Gospel of God and the Kingdom of God</i>	263
<i>The Discipleship Community and the Ethics of God's Present Activity</i>	267
<i>The Discipleship Community and Suffering as the will of God</i>	280
<i>The Discipleship Community and God's Eschatological Salvation, Vindication, and Reward</i>	293
Summary and Conclusions	296
 <b>Chapter 6: The Theology of the Gospel of Mark</b>	 <b>298</b>
The God of Mark's Gospel	299
<i>Mark's God is the God of the Living</i>	299
<i>Mark's God is Primarily Known and Experienced</i>	

<i>through Jesus</i>	300
<i>Mark's God is the Authoritative Identifier of Jesus</i>	302
<i>Mark's God is Active in the Sufferings and Vindication of Jesus and Those Who Follow Jesus</i>	302
<i>Mark's God Dispels Evil and Those Who Oppose the Will of God</i>	303
<i>Mark's God Establishes a New Covenant Community</i>	304
The God of Mark and the Authorial Audience	306
Contributions to Markan Scholarship	309
 <i>Bibliography</i>	 312

## Abbreviations

The abbreviations utilized in the notes of this thesis adhere to those in Patrick H. Alexander, *et. al.*, eds., *The SBL Handbook of Style: For Ancient Near Eastern, Biblical, and Early Christian Studies* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999).

# Chapter One

## The “Neglected” God of the Gospel of Mark

### Introduction

Almost three decades past, Nils Dahl drew attention to the lack of scholarship devoted to the study of God in the New Testament, calling it the “neglected factor.”<sup>1</sup> In that brief but influential essay, Dahl suggested that there are two primary reasons for this neglect. One, there has been a predominance of Christocentrism in New Testament studies since the nineteenth century. And two, the New Testament itself “contains few, if any, thematic formulations about God.”<sup>2</sup> Since Dahl’s remarks, a handful of studies have been devoted to filling this void.<sup>3</sup> Yet while these studies have made some headway into various sections of the New Testament, there has been very little concentration on the study of God in the Gospel of Mark.

Studies on Mark have focused largely on two primary areas of investigation. The predominant subject of concentration has been Mark’s Christology. Moreover,

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<sup>1</sup> Nils A. Dahl, “The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology,” in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine* (ed. Donald H. Juel; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 153-162. Originally appeared in *Reflections* 75 (1975): 5-8.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 156.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Jouette Bassler, *Divine Impartiality: Paul and a Theological Axiom* (SBLDS 59; Chico: Scholars Press, 1981); *idem*, “God (NT),” in *Anchor Bible Dictionary* Vol. 2 (ed. D. N. Freedman; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1049-1055; Robert L. Brawley, *Centering on God: Method and Message in Luke-Acts* (Louisville, KY: WJKP); Ferdinand. Hahn, “The Confession of One God in the New Testament,” *HBT* 2 (1980): 69-84; Larry W. Hurtado, “God,” In *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J.B. Green & S. McKnight; Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 270-276; Robert L. Mowery, “Lord, God, and Father: Theological Language in Luke-Acts,” *SBL Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 43; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995), 82-101; *idem*, “The Disappearance of the Father: The References to God the Father in Luke-Acts,” *Encounter* 55 (1994): 353-358; *idem*, “God the Father in Luke-Acts,” in *New Views on Luke and Acts* (ed. E. Richard, ed; Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1990), 124-132; *idem*, “Direct Statements Concerning God’s Activity in Acts,” *SBL Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 29; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1990), 196-211; *idem*, “The Activity of God in the Gospel of Matthew,” *SBL Seminar Papers* (SBLSP 28; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1989), 400-411; *idem*, “God, Lord and Father: The Theology of the Gospel of Matthew,” *BR* 33 (1988): 24-36; Halvor Moxnes, *Theology in Conflict: Studies in Paul’s Understanding of God in Romans* (NovTSup. 53; Leiden: Brill, 1980); Neil Richardson, *Paul’s Language about God* (JSNTSup 99; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); *idem*, *God in the New Testament* (London: Epworth Press, 1999); Marianne M. Thompson, “God’s Voice You have Never Heard, God’s Form You have Never Seen: The Characterization of God in the Gospel of John,” *Semeia* 63 (1993): 177-204; *idem*, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2000); *idem*, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001); D. Francois Tolmie, “The Characterization of God in the Fourth Gospel,” *JSNT* 69 (1998): 57-75.

we do not lack investigations into the Gospel's definition of discipleship. Insufficient attention has been directed, however, toward the *theo*-logy of the narrative, i.e., what Mark states concerning God. This remains a neglected factor. In light of this, this present thesis contributes to the filling of this void by addressing the role that God plays in the narrative of Mark by utilising methods of literary criticism, particularly those used to discuss the presentation of characters in narrative.

While the application of literary criticism, and the study of characterisation, are not new in the study of Mark's story, these methods have not been fully applied in the study of God in the Gospel.<sup>4</sup> By using a literary critical approach, in so far as a literary approach forces the interpreter to see the narrative holistically, I hope to demonstrate and describe the role which God plays in the narrative and how the presentation of God relates to the Christology of Mark's Gospel and the narrative's view of discipleship. While there are direct references to God in the Gospel, and God also speaks in the narrative, to limit the study to these will limit the scope of the investigation. Therefore, it will be crucial to use a close reading of the text to determine not only explicit but also implicit references to God.

By applying a close reading of the text, and the literary critical method of character study, I will argue that God plays a crucial and active role in the narrative; that Mark's Christology and view of discipleship are better understood as aspects of the presentation of God; and that the presentation of God in Mark may serve as the fundamental purpose of Mark's Gospel.

Moreover, I am concerned throughout this thesis to draw out how a first century audience might have understood this narrative as an auditory event. Mark's Gospel, like other narratives of the ancient world, was most likely read and/or performed before a listening audience. The printed text for them became a temporal

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<sup>4</sup> The amount of scholarship utilising various literary critical methods in the study of Mark, as well as the other Gospels, is too great to give sufficient citations here. I refer the reader, however, to the bibliography and to Mark A. Powell, *The Bible and Modern Literary Criticism: A Critical Assessment and Annotated Bibliography* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1991). In the decade since the appearance of Powell's work studies employing literary critical methods to read Mark have grown exponentially.

event in which they too became involved with the plot and characters of the story. Mark's narrative, then, not only communicates information to its audience, it also is intended to do something to its audience, to affect its audience. The Gospel has a rhetorical dimension. Mark's story, then, as I shall argue throughout this work communicates knowledge about the God who is now experienced in the coming of Jesus, affects the audience's general understanding about God, and invites them to respond to the presentation of God via the oration of the story.

### **Minor Progress in the Study of God in the Gospel of Mark**

As stated above, there is little that has been published on the study of God in the second Gospel. Two journal articles, however, have been published in an attempt to address this important issue. The first attempt to tackle the neglected God of Mark was taken by John R. Donahue in an article appearing in the *Journal of Biblical Literature* in 1982.<sup>5</sup> The second scholar to concentrate solely on the God of Mark's narrative was Paul Danove in a 2001 *Novum Testamentum* article.<sup>6</sup>

After surveying the limited scholarship on the study of God in Mark, Donahue gives an overview of the use of Θεός in the Gospel. His discussion is insightful and helps the reader gain a broad picture of God as defined by Mark. As well, he highlights the divergent views of Matthew, Luke, and Mark, pointing out that Mark has less to say than the other two concerning God. Most of Donahue's discussion, however, is devoted to an exegesis of Mark 12:13-34, verses which he states, "provide a hermeneutical key for related issues."<sup>7</sup> From his overview of the second Gospel, and his exegesis of the passages from Mark 12, Donahue concludes, "Jesus speaks authoritatively for God and summons his hearers to a right

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<sup>5</sup> John R. Donahue, "A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark," *JBL* 101 (1982): 563-594.

<sup>6</sup> Paul Danove, "The Narrative Function of Mark's Characterization of God," *NovT* 43 (2001): 12-30.

<sup>7</sup> Donahue, "Neglected Factor," 570.



understanding of God's revelation in scripture."<sup>8</sup> He then relates this view of God to the themes of discipleship and Christology within the Gospel.

While I agree with much of Donahue's proposal, an understanding of God within the Gospel of Mark requires a more thorough examination and a more extensive discussion. Although Donahue contributes to Markan scholarship by pointing out various references to God, including the use of the "theological passive"<sup>9</sup>, he may be overlooking other implied references to God, as well as God's activity in the Gospel.

Paul Danove takes the study of Mark's presentation of God a bit further by investigating the characterisation of God and its narrative function in Mark. He proceeds by identifying and categorizing "textual references to God according to the semantic functions (agent, patient, experiencer, source, goal, benefactive) attributed to God."<sup>10</sup> He offers a "rhetorical analysis" that "examines the use of repetition to raise certain aspects of God's characterization to prominence."<sup>11</sup> He then concludes with an investigation of how the "distribution of references to God" functions in "the overall narrative development of Mark."<sup>12</sup>

Like Donahue, Danove advances Markan studies in this area, particularly in the attention he gives not only to explicit references to God in Mark, but also in the effort he makes to draw out implicit references to God.<sup>13</sup> Danove is very much concerned with the agency of God in Mark, the narrative function of this agency, and how this agency aligns Jesus with God. Moreover, his conclusion that this characterisation of God in Mark invites "the reader to a deeper relationship with

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 581-582.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 566.

<sup>10</sup> Danove, "Narrative Function," 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Danove may be the most helpful in this respect. He offers the following criteria for determining implicit references to God in Mark: "(1) a word that appears in the text requires completion by another word or phrase for its correct grammatical usage; (2) that required complement is not present in the text; (3) collateral information, as specified in the discussion of explicit reference, indicates that God is an appropriate referent of that character designated by the missing complement." (Danove, 13).

God” agrees with one aspect of my thesis, that the presentation of God has a rhetorical effect on the audience of Mark’s narrative.<sup>14</sup>

Similar to my view of Donahue’s work, I agree with a great deal of Danove’s project, and especially his conclusions. However, as the case with Donahue’s endeavour, because Danove’s work is concisely presented in a journal article, he has not been able to address completely the neglected factor in Mark. He offers much material that is both suggestive and supportive to my work in this thesis. Yet a more systematic and comprehensive investigation of God in the Gospel of Mark is needed, one which encompasses the whole narrative, looks carefully for explicit and implicit references to God, and relies on a theory of reading and characterisation in literature that helps to draw out not only the portrayal of God as character in the story, but also the importance this characterisation has for understanding the Christology of Mark, Mark’s view of discipleship, and the effect of this portrayal upon a listening audience.

### **Mark: Christological or Theological Narrative?**

Can a narrative which explicitly identifies itself as a narrative about “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” have much to say concerning God? Can a narrative in which Jesus is the clear protagonist of the story, and in which God seemingly plays little part in the narrative, have anything implicitly or explicitly to say about God? These are questions along the line of Dahl’s suggested reasons for the “neglected factor” in New Testament theology. The christocentric focus of the New Testament, and here, the Gospel of Mark, does not make it especially clear that the Gospel is primarily about God.

But this disregards the larger question the Gospel of Mark may be seeking to answer. While the question “Who is Jesus?” is one query the Gospel attempts to resolve, the larger question of “Who is God?” must also be of importance, indeed of

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., 30.

primary importance. The beginning of the narrative in which the author states that the story concerns “Jesus Christ, the Son of God” not only communicates something about who this Jesus is, but also conveys something about who God is.<sup>15</sup> This is the very point Schubert Ogden makes about the question, “Who is Jesus?”<sup>16</sup> If Jesus is the Son of God, Ogden argues, then the question “Who is God?” is logically prior.<sup>17</sup> In other words, to discover who Jesus is is also to discover who God is. If we follow this line of argument, then the acceptance of Mark’s narrative as a communiqué about Jesus must also be an acceptance of the narrative as a story about God; Mark makes it so. Further, since the first action narrated in the story is God’s action of sending his messenger, as told by the narrator via the words of the prophet of Israel, the narrative is indeed quite concerned with communicating to its audience something about God. In applying Ogden’s questions to the text of Mark, this thesis will be asking the prior question, “Who is God?” Yet, we will not neglect the secondary question, “Who is Jesus?” But this question can only be addressed in relation to the prior question; the two questions can never be isolated.

Moreover, I am concerned in this thesis to ask the existential question also suggested by Ogden, but not in the broad sense that he proposes. While he argues that the existential question of Christology is, “Who are we?” the existential question for Mark’s audience as I see it is, “How do we respond to the in breaking of God through the envoy Jesus?”<sup>18</sup> It is readily accepted by many scholars that the Gospel narratives were not written solely to provide information, but that they were also

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, the prior question of who God is in relation to the narrative being about Jesus Christ, the Son of God is dependent on the originality of “Son of God” in 1:1. I shall deal with this in chapter 2.

<sup>16</sup> Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1982), 20-40.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid., 25. Leander E. Keck, “Toward the Renewal of New Testament Christology,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 363 makes similar points to that of Ogden and states, “Nils A. Dahl has rightly observed that the understanding of God has been the neglected factor in the study of NT theology as a whole. This is particularly true of the study of NT Christology, even though every statement about Christ implicates God, beginning with the designation of Jesus as the Anointed.”

<sup>18</sup> This is not to say that Mark has nothing to say about humanity in general, nor do I disagree fundamentally with Ogden’s question “Who are we?” However, it seems to me, as I think Markan scholarship has proven, the narrative seeks to answer the question, “What does it mean to be a disciple?” I will seek to answer this from a theological perspective.

penned to persuade an audience.<sup>19</sup> In other words, the Gospels have a rhetorical effect on an audience, one that moves an audience to believe something or do something. As I shall argue, the presentation of God in Mark has a great deal to do with the narrative's view of discipleship, i.e., an audience's response to the God of Mark. Their response is to do the will of God.

It may go without saying that any critique that Mark's narrative is not concerned with God is unfounded. The more pertinent question is how does one uncover explicit and implicit references to God in the narrative. Dahl suggested that one of the reasons for neglecting the study of God in the New Testament has to do with the insufficient number of thematic formulations about God. If one views the New Testament looking for formulations that give clues to beliefs about God held to be true behind the world of the text, then Dahl is right in his assessment. However, if we are primarily concerned with New Testament theology as it is found in the New Testament, that is the literature of the New Testament, then perhaps there exists an avenue leading to the resolution of the neglected factor. Perhaps looking for thematic formulations about God in the literature of early Christianity is limiting the search. Is it necessary to discover these formulaic assertions about God? If we are seeking to ask the question from a historical-critical perspective, it may, indeed, be a way to discover what an early Christian perspective of God looked like.<sup>20</sup>

If we are seeking, on the other hand, to discover what the New Testament itself says about God, and how an audience in front of the text might hear this, we should incorporate a different methodological approach, one that reads a Gospel as a literary text intended to inform and move its audience. In other words, instead of being concerned with what is behind the text of Mark, or with what Mark as an historical author was intending, we might find answers to the question of God in the

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<sup>19</sup> For example, Mary Ann Tolbert states that Gospel seeks to persuade the audience to become the "perfect disciple" (Mary A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989], 297).

<sup>20</sup> See for example Eric Osborn, *The Emergence of Christian Theology* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1993). Although Osborn deals mainly with the latter half of the second century, his insights could shed further light on the subject of theology in earlier Christianity.

Gospel narrative by focusing attention on the communication between text and audience.<sup>21</sup> This does not mean that seeking historical answers or literary ones are mutually exclusive. Both are admirable, and both are limited in their functions. However, if one is set to discover the *theo*-logy of the Gospel of Mark, then one must be concerned primarily with the narrative and how its audience understands this narrative.<sup>22</sup> One needs a heuristic way of reading that leads to desirable conclusions.

### Literary Criticism and the Gospels

Within the last two decades literary criticism has become an important and vital method within biblical studies. This is particularly true regarding studies concentrating on the Gospels. It is, however, still important for one to make a case for using these methods due to the continued predominance of historical-critical methods.

Traditionally, historical-critical methods have been employed to study motifs in the Gospels. Form-criticism, behind the ingenuity of Martin Dibelius, sought to isolate the various forms within the narratives, and then to focus on the *Sitz im Leben* of those forms in order to determine meaning.<sup>23</sup> As Mary Ann Tolbert has stated, form-critical methods sought to get at the *Vorleben* of the Gospels, mainly in an attempt to seek out the historical Jesus.<sup>24</sup> Although form-criticism contributed greatly to the study of the Gospel stories, it failed in handling these narratives as

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<sup>21</sup> Here may be a good place to clarify the use of the term "Mark" in this thesis. As I am concerned primarily with the text of Mark and not with venturing to identify a historical author named Mark, I will be using "Mark" in reference to the narrative.

<sup>22</sup> The focus of this thesis is also somewhat influenced by the rise of narrative theology among some theologians. See for example Hans Frei, *The Eclipse of the Biblical Narrative: A Study in Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Hermeneutics* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1974); idem, *The Identity of Jesus Christ* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Ronald Thiemann, *Revelation and Theology: The Gospel as Narrated Promise* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1985); Michael Goldberg, *Theology and Narrative: A Critical Introduction* (2nd ed. Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991); George Stroup, *The Promise of Narrative Theology: Recovering the Gospel in the Church* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1981).

<sup>23</sup> Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (trans. B.L. Woolf; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1935).

<sup>24</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 21.

finished, whole texts. Following the work of form-criticism, Gospel scholarship, behind the initiative of Willi Marxsen and others, sought to view each evangelist as a compiler, or redactor, of the various traditions about Jesus.<sup>25</sup> These “redactors” were viewed as having a theological agenda that influenced the way they placed together the traditions available to them. The task of the redaction critic is to cull out how each evangelist altered the tradition handed on to him or the sources available to him, in order to determine the theology of the historical evangelist. Although redaction criticism moved beyond the practices of its parent disciplines, the focus remained on the different parts of the text, as well as the historical authors and situations in which these texts were formed, and not on the texts themselves as whole narratives.<sup>26</sup>

While both form-criticism and redaction-criticism greatly advanced the study of the Gospels, it was imperative that any significant study of the Gospels must deal with these texts as whole narratives and not exclusively as collections of traditions. This focus was brought to the attention of biblical scholars by Amos Wilder in his monograph *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel*.<sup>27</sup> In that work Wilder called on biblical scholarship to give more attention to the literary condition of the New Testament. Thus began a movement to view the Gospels not simply as windows onto the early Christian communities, but also as literary documents which could be analysed by using the methods of literary criticism.<sup>28</sup> With this sudden rise in literary studies, however, came both negative and positive responses. Briefly, therefore, I will attempt to answer three criticisms of the use of literary methods in biblical studies, and then I will point out the positive contributions literary criticism has made, and continues to make within the discipline.

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<sup>25</sup> Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*. (ed. J. Boyce, et. al.; Nashville: Abingdon Press. 1969).

<sup>26</sup> See C. Clifton Black, “The Quest of Mark the Redactor: Why Has It Been Pursued, and What Has It Taught Us?” *JSNT* 33 (1988): 19-39.

<sup>27</sup> Amos N. Wilder, *Early Christian Rhetoric: The Language of the Gospel* (London: SCM Press, 1964).

<sup>28</sup> For a good overview of the shift in methodology within New Testament scholarship see John R. Donahue, “The Literary Turn and New Testament Theology: Detour or New Direction,” *JR* 76 (1996): 250-275.



First, it is claimed by those who are suspicious of literary criticism that the application of modern literary methods in the study of ancient narratives is methodologically unsound. The basis of such a claim rests on the assumption that the literary milieu of the first century is quite different from the modern world. While this argument must be taken seriously, this does not nullify that the narratives of the Bible are stories which contain plot, point of view, characters, etc., which are also found in modern narratives. Simply stated, all would certainly agree that the Gospels are narratives, whatever one may argue concerning genre, and this narrative quality must be considered important. It seems, therefore, that literary critical methods can add to our understanding of these literary achievements.

An argument against the use of literary methods closely related to the one just mentioned is that the literary methods used are those used to study modern fictions. Titles of books on literary method such as *The Rhetoric of Fiction* and *Narrative Fiction*<sup>29</sup> raise questions concerning the viability of such methods for the study of the Gospels. This, of course, makes the assumption that the Gospel narratives are only historical accounts, when in fact they do have a degree of fictionality to them. Robert Alter has described the narratives of the Hebrew Bible as both *fictionalised history* and *historicised fiction*.<sup>30</sup> While he does not often distinguish between the two, his use of these terms suggests that there is a degree of fiction to the biblical narratives. This is certainly true, as well, for the Gospel narratives. While not wanting to state that there is no referential or historical value to the narratives, for certainly there is, we must also point out that the authors of these narratives were creative in their presentation of these historical occurrences. This, of course, moves past the findings of both form and redaction criticism by viewing the evangelists not primarily as compilers or redactors of traditions, but as authors of stories.

A third criticism of the use of modern literary criticism in the study of the Gospels is that literary critical approaches focus more on how contemporary readers

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<sup>29</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*. (2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1983).

<sup>30</sup> Robert Alter, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1981), 25-41.

understand these texts, rather than on how real ancient readers would have understood them. The accusation set forth by this criticism is that the original meaning of the text, that is in its historical context, is the true and only meaning. The use of modern literary criticism, then, moves away from Stendahl's dichotomy of what the text meant and what the text came to mean, to simply what the text means.<sup>31</sup> Again, while this may be true of certain strands of literary approaches, others take seriously the text, and speak of the reader as that reader who is to know and catch signals laid out in the text, including historical or cultural references. More, however, will be said concerning readers later in the discussion.<sup>32</sup>

From these brief, but important, warnings concerning the use of literary critical methods in the study of the gospel narratives, it may seem that the prospects for the value of these methods are quite dim. On the other hand, many biblical scholars who utilise literary critical methods have proposed various positive contributions literary methods have made to Gospel study, two of which are important to this thesis.

One important value in using literary critical methods is that the focus of inquiry is not on the world behind the text, but on the world of the text itself. In other words, the literary value of the whole text is emphasised. This, of course, is a move away from form-criticism, which emphasised the various forms within the narratives, and redaction- criticism, which is concerned with how each evangelist altered material to meet his theological purpose. Biblical scholars who incorporate literary critical methods in their study of the Gospels, then, focus on the whole

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<sup>31</sup> Krister Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 1, 14. See also Stendahl's Presidential Address at the 1983 Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature ("The Bible as a Classic and the Bible as Holy Scripture," *JBL* 103 [1984] 3-10) where he challenges the literary critical methodology for not taking seriously what he calls the "normative nature" of the Bible, by which he means the "original intention of the texts" (9).

<sup>32</sup> Two important studies of the rhetorical effect of Mark on a first century audience can be mentioned at this point. Mary Ann Tolbert's *Sowing the Gospel* and Mary Ann Beavis' *Mark's Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark's Audience* (JSNTSup 33; Sheffield Academic Press, 1989) both seek to understand Mark's narrative through a reader-response approach, but one that takes seriously the first century audience.



narratives as we have them, and not on the historical development of those narratives.<sup>33</sup>

The emphasis on the rhetorical nature of narratives is also a positive aspect of literary criticism. While historical critics focus on what the text meant, what information it conveyed, literary critics see the text as communicating more than information. These stories also call on the hearer to respond to the story. In other words, the message of the text is not found through direct statements, but through the story itself. This may be done in direct ways much like when the narrator of Mark's narrative calls on the reader to understand, or indirectly as when a character is portrayed as being a positive or negative role model. Thus literary critics are interested in not only *what* is stated (story), but also *how* it is stated (discourse).<sup>34</sup>

To summarize to this point the approach to be taken in this thesis, I will be reading the narrative of Mark as a holistic narrative. This does not negate the fact that the compilation of Mark does have a history. But I am not concerned with the diachronic approach to the Gospel. Rather, I am seeking to read the Gospel synchronically, that is in its final form<sup>35</sup>, and to view the story as having a rhetorical affect on its readers. Thus, I am also interested in how stories are read.

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<sup>33</sup> See Francis Watson, "Literary Approaches to the Gospels: A Theological Assessment," *Theology* 99 (1996): 125-133; Mark A. Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism?* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 85-86.

<sup>34</sup> On this see Seymour Chatman, *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1978). Cf. Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand: Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 16.

<sup>35</sup> The use of this term requires that I define what I mean by the *final text*. By text, I mean to speak of that which is finished, in the sense that it is no longer a part of its author, it speaks for itself. By final text, in relation to Mark, I mean the Greek text of the Nestle-Aland 27<sup>th</sup> Ed. The crucial question that cannot be addressed in detail concerning this text is of course the question of Mark's ending. I have concluded, along with the majority of scholars that Mark's Gospel ends at 16:8. Any other variants or translations that are significant to the discussion will be handled as each pericope is discussed.

### “Let the Reader Understand”: Ways of Reading Mark

Since the study of how readers read is a world of many theories, it is crucial that we grasp somewhat of a handle on this debate.<sup>36</sup> New Criticism, developed in the early forties, sought to move literary criticism past the concerns extrinsic to the text, such as the historical circumstances that gave rise to a text, or the social context of that work, to having in view only the text itself. In other words, these critics felt that the literary text contained all one needed to know, and that a “close reading” of the text was sufficient to determine meaning.<sup>37</sup> These new critics viewed literature as a language of itself. For them the structure of that text held importance for meaning. This view, however, resulted in literary theory being cut off from the language of science and historical investigation, presenting the idea that this new criticism stood above these other disciplines.<sup>38</sup> While New Criticism presented the literary critical world with the importance of close reading for explicating the meaning of a text, it completely divided the process by which a narrative is communicated.<sup>39</sup> It gave no room for the importance of the reader in the communication process, and the text became only a spatial object.

Challenging New Criticism, Wolfgang Iser has stated that “central to the reading of every literary work is the interaction between its structure and its recipient.”<sup>40</sup> He suggested that there are two poles to the reading process. One is the *artistic pole* which is the author’s text. The other is the *aesthetic pole* which is the realisation of the text accomplished in the reader.<sup>41</sup> Communication for Iser, then, is the interaction between these two poles, for the structures within the text are not

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<sup>36</sup> On the variety of categories of reader-response theory see Susan R. Suleiman and Inge Crossman, eds., *The Reader in the Text: Essays on Audience and Interpretation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

<sup>37</sup> M. H. Abrams, *A Glossary of Literary Terms* 7<sup>th</sup> Ed. (Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace College Publishers, 1999), 180-182.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 181.

<sup>39</sup> See John A. Darr, *Herod the Fox: Audience Criticism and Lukan Characterization* (JSNTSup 163; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 27.

<sup>40</sup> Wolfgang Iser, *The Act of Reading* (London and Henley: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), 20.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*

fulfilled until they affect the reader.<sup>42</sup> The reading of a text, then, is the communication between that text and the apprehension of meaning by the reader of that text.

Iser, however, makes one crucial point that must be clarified here. The whole of a text can never be viewed at one time. Even though we may have read a certain text over and over, each time we read something different occurs, not in the text, but in the act of reading. Reading then, for Iser, is “an intersection between retention and protension.”<sup>43</sup> As we read, each sentence leads us to alter what we have read before, and then to change our expectations of what is to come. These expectations are subsequently answered, either affirmatively or negatively, and will cause new expectations to be produced in the mind of the reader. The reading process is, according to Iser, an event where the reader is actively participating and changing with the text. By accepting that reading is a process, we may agree with Iser and others who have suggested that the narrative should be viewed not as a spatial object, but as a temporal narrative.<sup>44</sup> As the narrative moves, so the reader moves with it, processing what has past, and in turn, altering expectations of what is to come. The full efficacy of the narrative, then, is not completed until the reader apprehends that meaning.

Iser, however, makes a further point concerning the reading process when he speaks about readers filling gaps. These gaps or blanks are holes in the narrative where the text offers limited or no explanations, and the reader is left to decide what is absent based on clues in the text. This, of course, requires the reader to be close in tune with the narrative, catching all the signals which are there to guide the reader. Iser in fact sees the interaction between text and reader as brought about by the “lack of ascertainability and defined intention.”<sup>45</sup> He goes on to state,

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 21.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 111.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid., 148-152; See also Thomas Docherty, *Reading (Absent) Character* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983), 127-155.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 166.

Whenever the reader bridges the gaps, communication begins. The gaps function as a kind of pivot on which the whole text-reader relationship revolves. Hence the structured blanks of the text stimulate the process of ideation to be performed by the reader on terms set by the text.<sup>46</sup>

Reading, therefore, is a process of communication between the text and the reader, who apprehends meaning from signals in the text and fills gaps left by the text.

The problem that quickly arises for anyone suspicious of such an approach is concern over how much influence the reader has in determining meaning. Does the reader haphazardly decide on what a narrative means? Is meaning then in the eyes of the reader, regardless of the text? The answer simply is no.

As we stated above, the communication process involves an interaction between the text and the reader. It is, therefore, fundamental that the text be what guides the reader in ascertaining meaning. Again, Iser has shown that this communication is dependent not only upon the reader, but also upon the text. He states that there are two aspects of the text that are crucial for understanding this relationship. The verbal aspect is that which directs the reader and prevents meaning from being arbitrary. The affective aspect describes the effect of the text that has been "prestructured by the language of the text."<sup>47</sup> Meaning then is prestructured in the text and must be apprehended by the reader for communication to be successful between text and reader. But is this possible? Do readers of literature catch all that is constructed in a text that is intended to illicit response? To answer these questions, we must turn to discuss what is meant by the term reader.

There have been many proposals as to who the reader of a given text is. With so many "types" of readers being discussed by literary critics, it is essential that we briefly review this discussion, and then define what is meant by the term "reader" (or audience) in this thesis.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 169.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 21.

Stanley Fish, earlier in his thought, conceived of what he called the “informed reader.” This reader is a component speaker of the language out of which the text is built up and is in full possession of “semantic knowledge that a mature... listener brings to his task of comprehension.” This reader has literary competence.<sup>48</sup> For Fish the informed reader is a “hybrid” between an abstraction and a living reader. This reader is “a real reader (me) who does everything within his power to make himself informed.”<sup>49</sup>

Iser argues that there are two types of readers, real and hypothetical. The real readers are those discovered in studies of the history of interpretation when a text is received by a “specific reading public.” The information one finds concerning these real readers many times depends on what can be understood from the texts themselves.<sup>50</sup> This is the case when New Testament critics seek to locate the first readers of Mark, i.e., the Markan community. Information is gained from the text itself to help locate the region where this community resided as well as the conditions in which they lived.<sup>51</sup>

Hypothetical readers, on the other hand, are not flesh and blood readers per se, but are those whose role is found in the text.<sup>52</sup> What Iser calls the *ideal reader* falls under this category. This reader is not only presupposed by the text but also has an identical code as that of the author.<sup>53</sup>

In making such distinctions, Iser seeks to differentiate between real readers and what he calls implied readers. He defines an implied reader as the one who “embodies all those predispositions necessary for a literary work to exercise its

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<sup>48</sup> Stanley Fish, “Literature in the Reader: Affective Stylistics,” *New Literary History* 2 (1970), 145.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid. It is well known in literary critical circles that Fish has moved away from this understanding of the reader to focus on the authority of reading communities. For details concerning this transformation see Stanley Fish, *‘Is there a Text in this Class?’: The Authority of Interpretative Communities* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1980).

<sup>50</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 28.

<sup>51</sup> For an overview of the discussion concerning the so-called “Markan Community” see Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 24-37.

<sup>52</sup> Iser, *The Act of Reading*, 28.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 29

effect- predispositions laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself.”<sup>54</sup> This is the position which Fish seems to take regarding his “informed reader.” The implied reader is, therefore, a construct of the text and is not the real reader, although there may be much overlap.<sup>55</sup> The implied reader is, much like the informed reader, presupposed by the text.

In order to talk about the implied reader, however, one must also speak of the knowledge the reader has which is presupposed by the text. In other words, the implied reader must have some prior knowledge before coming to the text to read. There are historical, cultural, and linguistic concepts that are presupposed by a narrative, and therefore not explained by the narrative, that lead narrative critics to propose that the implied reader knows these things. Likewise, that which is explained by the narrator may be knowledge that the implied reader does not have. It is the goal, then, of the narrative critic “to know everything that the text assumes the reader knows and to ‘forget’ everything that the text does not assume the reader knows.”<sup>56</sup>

The implied readers of Mark then are those that are presumed to know Greek, have some familiarity with the LXX, and have a similar worldview as that of the author, e.g., belief in the power of the demonic and the possibility of miracles. On the other hand, the implied readers are not presumed to be completely familiar with Jewish tradition, such as the washing of hands (7:3-4). Nor are they presumed to know Aramaic, for the author translates phrases for them (5:41; 15:34). The real reader of Mark must take steps to become the implied reader presupposed by the Gospel.

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Powell, *What is Narrative Criticism*, 20.

**“But what if the “readers” were listening?”<sup>57</sup>**

With this question, Stephen Moore brings to the surface an issue that is not always recognised. Certainly it is beyond question that the reading of texts in the first century was primarily conducted audibly. Moreover, since the predominant culture of communication was oral, and the literacy rate was low, most people would have heard a document being read aloud, instead of reading the text themselves.<sup>58</sup> Moore points out that the silent reading of the printed text, which views the text as a spatial object, may be missing what the text proposes be heard.<sup>59</sup> We have become accustomed to having the printed text before us, and the ability of looking not only backwards in the text, but also forwards. This way of viewing the text, however, may have skewed our understanding of the communication between text and audience. But the hearing of a text is a temporal event, and the hearer must move only as far as the text has gone. The hearer may anticipate what is to follow in a narrative, but he or she cannot accurately describe the scenes to follow until those scenes have past; *à la* Iser’s intersection between retention and protension. If one

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<sup>57</sup> Stephen D. Moore, *Literary Criticism and the Gospels: The Theoretical Challenge* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1989), 84.

<sup>58</sup> For discussions of orality and literacy in antiquity see Alan Bowman and Greg Woolf, eds., *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994); William V. Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989); Eric A. Havelock, *The Muse Learns to Write: Reflections on Orality and Literacy from Antiquity to the Present* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); Walter J. Ong, S.J., *Orality and Literacy* (New York and London: Methuen & Co., 1982).

For discussions of orality and aurality as they relate to the study of the New Testament see Paul J. Achtemeier, “Omne Verbum Sonat: The New Testament and the Oral Environment of Late Western Antiquity,” *JBL* 109 (1990): 3-27; Joanna Dewey, “Oral Methods of Structuring Narrative in Mark,” *Int* 43 (1989): 32-44; idem, “Mark as Interwoven Tapestry: Forecasts and Echoes for a Listening Audience,” *CBQ* 53 (1991): 221-236; idem, “The Gospel of Mark as an Oral-Aural Event: Implications for Interpretation,” in *The New Literary Criticism and the New Testament* (ed. E. S. Malbon & E. V. McKnight; JSNTSup 109; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 145-163; idem, ed., *Orality and Textuality in Early Christian Literature. Semeia* 65 (Decatur: Scholars Press, 1994); Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Werner H. Kelber, *The Oral and the Written Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983; reprint with new introduction, Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); George Kennedy, *New Testament Interpretation through Rhetorical Criticism* (London: University of North Carolina, 1984); Lou H. Silberman, ed., *Orality, Aurality and Biblical Narrative. Semeia* 39 (Decatur: Scholars Press, 1987); Elizabeth S. Malbon, *Hearing Mark: A Listener’s Guide* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 2002).

<sup>59</sup> Moore, *Literary Criticism*, 85-86.



reads the printed text, then one has the ability to move to any part of that story to view what takes place. On the other hand, if one hears a story, one can only reflect on what has past and cannot jump to what is in the future of the story, except by way of expectation.

Having raised this issue, Moore suggests that reader-response criticism may be as close as we can get to understanding the hearing of the narrative. He states, "It may well be that reader-response exegetes inadvertently do justice to the oral-aural factor in a way that redaction critics and narrative critics do not."<sup>60</sup> Thus, if we propose to follow Iser's theory of reading which describes reading as a process of interaction between text and reader, and that being a process, it is a temporal event, then we can agree with Moore and others who view this reading strategy as moving the reader closer to being the hearer.<sup>61</sup> Consequently the hearing of the narrative by a Markan audience is a *temporal event* in which the audience *engages* with the story of the Gospel, its plot, settings, and particularly its characters. Through this temporal engagement with the story, a Markan audience will move with the narrative, retaining past knowledge and creating expectations of what is to come in the narrative. It is through this process that an audience of Mark is drawn into the story. It is this engagement between the text of Mark and an implied listening audience, particularly how the narrative communicates God to that audience that interests me in this thesis.

One caveat, however, must be admitted from the beginning. As a critic of the Gospel of Mark it is impossible for me, or any other critic, to read or hear the narrative for the first time.<sup>62</sup> Although a first hearing can never be recaptured, especially since one's reading is always clouded by the multiplicity of previous readings by oneself and other readers, every effort will be made to approach the

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid., 86.

<sup>61</sup> See also Robert M. Fowler, *Let the Reader Understand* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 41-58.

<sup>62</sup> For a serious assessment of the critic versus reader problem see George Steiner, "Critic/Reader," *New Literary History* 10 (1979), 423-52. Steiner takes the professional guild to task for placing themselves between a work and its audience.



reading/hearing experience as a temporal event in which the narrative invites the hearers or audience to participate in the story.<sup>63</sup> Therefore, I will endeavour throughout to perform the role of a first hearer or reader, that is to say the one implied by the text. In reality I may be only reading what I propose to be the “reader” prescribed by the text. Nevertheless, it is my understanding that the implied audience role is the role the narrative calls us to play. As James Resseguie has suggested concerning the role of the reader, the critic is to ask continually, “What is being done to the reader?”<sup>64</sup>

Thus far I have defined reading as a process of communication that involves interaction between both text and reader. The text lays out signs that the audience is to understand in order to apprehend meaning. As well, the narrative leaves gaps that the audience is to fill. This does not mean that the audience provides its own meaning for the text, but that the audience chooses to apprehend certain inferences from the text to fill the gaps. When the hearers are able to fill the gaps, and apprehend the meaning of the text, then, and only then, does communication truly take place.

Furthermore, I have argued that the idea that reading is a temporal process may be helpful in hearing the narrative as a listening audience might have heard it presented. This way of hearing the Gospel of Mark as a first century audience may have heard it requires more clarification.

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<sup>63</sup> Given the plethora of scholarly work on Mark, one is always influenced by these works in one's reading of the Gospel. This cannot be prevented. Scholarship on Mark, however, is for the benefit of every interpreter, for scholarly works on Mark, at least in theory, seek to bring readers of Mark to a better understanding of the text, i.e., closer to being implied readers.

<sup>64</sup> James L. Resseguie, “Reader- Response Criticism and the Synoptic Gospels,” *JAAR* 52 (1984), 316; Cf. Fish, *Is there a Text in this Class?*, 26-27. In relation to the biblical narratives, Robert Alter has stated that the aim of the narratives is “to ‘draw me out of myself,’ using the medium of narrative to transform my sense of the world, urgently alert me to spiritual realities and moral imperatives I might have misconceived, or not conceived at all” (*World of Biblical Literature* {New York: Basic Books, 1992}, 9).

### Hearing the Gospel in the First Century

It has become common practice among some literary and reader-response critics of Mark's Gospel to neglect the historical and social setting of the hearing of the narrative. These critics have read the Gospel without giving proper attention to its first hearing within the Graeco-Roman world of the first century. Two studies, however, stand out as attempts to recapture a first hearing within this context, Mary A. Tolbert's *Sowing the Gospel* and Mary A. Beavis' *Mark's Audience*.<sup>65</sup> Of these two, Beavis' study is the most thorough and the most helpful for our purposes here.

Beavis highlights the Graeco-Roman culture in which the Gospel was both written and heard. She locates the author within the educational milieu of the Graeco-Roman world, arguing that the *chria*-form and rhetorical aspects of education must have influenced the Gospel writer. She also points to the potential influence the ancient theatre, the Greek novel, and ancient biography may have had on the narrative, particularly if one thinks of the narrative of Mark as being performed before a listening audience. She also argues that the Gospel of Mark was written as διδασχά, reflecting the presentation of Jesus (and the disciples) as teachers of the gospel.<sup>66</sup>

Beavis determines that the social setting of the Gospel, and particularly the audience of Mark, meant that an audience would have been well acquainted with the rhetorical style of the Gospel and would have been persuaded by its instruction. She also concludes that the intended (implied) audience would certainly have been Christian believers, but may also have included potential converts to the faith. She sees the influence of the theatre as presenting the possibility that the narrative was to be performed, or at least read aloud before a listening and viewing audience.

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<sup>65</sup> Beavis, *Mark's Audience*; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*. Beavis' work is more helpful for the approach taken in this thesis, and I shall discuss her work below. Tolbert sees Mark as similar to the Greek ancient novel (Tolbert, 65). Tolbert also finds that the Parable of the Sower and the Parable of the Wicked Tenants as keys to understanding the Christology of Mark. "The two parables in Mark present in concise, summary form the Gospel's view of Jesus." (Tolbert, 122).

<sup>66</sup> Beavis, *Mark's Audience*, 45-67.

I have only been able to summarize all too briefly Beavis' carefully argued thesis. Two strengths of her work are beneficial to my thesis. First, Beavis helps us better understand Mark's implied audience of the first century without venturing into the quagmire of identifying the geographical location of Mark's community. She helps us move closer to the audience that has the identical code of the author. Second, her suggestion concerning the performance of the Gospel to a mixed audience of believers and non-believers has repercussions for our reading of the narrative's presentation of God. If the Gospel was performed or read before an audience of believer's and non-believers, then the rhetorical effect of that event must be taken seriously. The reading aloud of the text, and certainly the performance of the text, enlists the imagination of those viewing and hearing the narrative. The words and actions of the narrative become for the audience "visual images... transformed directly into mental representation."<sup>67</sup> Thus the hearing of the narrative may indeed be both a *telling* of the story of God, Jesus and the discipleship community, as well as an *experience* of that story and an *experience* of the God who is mediated through the story.

I suggest that the presentation of God in Mark persuaded its audience that the God of Israel, the Creator God, is the God and πατήρ of Jesus who has come into the world via the chosen envoy, the beloved Son. This God is now extending relationship and covenant to those who hear the message of the Gospel, and who seek to do the will of God, which includes following the one sent from God. But this reading-hearing event was not solely for the purpose of telling history for history's sake.<sup>68</sup> Rather, the aural presentation of the story called the audience of the narrative to experience the God of the narrative.

Thus I am not challenging the conclusions drawn by Beavis, nor am I adding new insights. Rather, Beavis' project will help lend support to the reading strategy

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<sup>67</sup> Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (JSNTSup 164; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 19.

<sup>68</sup> Concerning Mark, Fowler comments, "...the narrative does not strive to convey meaning as referential content as much as it strives to achieve communion with its audience by means of a forceful event that takes place through time."

being utilized in this thesis, namely a reading that takes seriously the implied or authorial audience's hearing of the Gospel narrative within the first century world, and particularly how they may have heard the presentation of God.

### **Hearing God in/through the Narrative: Characterisation in Literature**

Drawing out the presentation of God in the Gospel requires a close reading of the text in which both implicit and explicit references to God or God's actions are recognized. To do this requires the utilization of the methods used by literary critics to discuss characterisation in narratives. Two questions concerning characterisation are pertinent for this thesis: 1) What significance do characters have to a story?; 2) How does a reader determine how a character is presented in a narrative?

#### *The Significance of God as Character in Mark*

The debate within literary criticism over the issue of characterisation can be seen by the contrasting views of two parties. On the one side there are the formalists who take a semiotic view of character. These critics see characters in stories as only plot functionaries, mere words on the page, who have no relationship with real people. In other words characters can only be experienced within the story itself and cannot be discussed as real people.<sup>69</sup> Robert Scholes has even stated that historical figures within narratives cannot be viewed as real.<sup>70</sup> On the other side of the deliberation there are the critics who view characters as mimetic. This position sees characters as representative of real people, who can be discussed apart from the story itself. Unlike the semiotic view, this view sees characters not simply as plot functionaries, or as mere words on the page, but as characters that can be experienced much like one experiences real people. As one literary critic recently stated,

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<sup>69</sup> David B. Gowler, *Host, Guest, Enemy, and Friend: Portraits of the Pharisees in Luke-Acts* (Emory Studies in Early Christianity. Vol. 2; New York: Peter Lang, 1991), 37-38.

<sup>70</sup> Robert Scholes, *Elements of Fiction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968), 17.

...there is a profound congruity between the ways in which we apprehend characters in literature, documented figures in history, and people of whom we have what we think of as direct knowledge of life. In my view, even the clues that we take in and use to construct an image of a person are virtually identical in literature and in life.<sup>71</sup>

In a 1979 article, literary critic Joel Weinsheimer, stated that characters are “textual persons” or “personified texts.”<sup>72</sup> By using these terms, he sought to bridge the gap between the sides by showing that characters are both semiotic and mimetic. He concluded that,

Characters are both people and words. No other account of their status is satisfying or complete. A character is neither reducible to words nor independent of them.<sup>73</sup>

Although it is not in the perspective of this project to solve this debate, nor do I have the aptitude to do so, it seems that Weinsheimer is correct. Certainly characters exist within the text of a narrative and serve to move along the plot. Yet to limit them only to a functionary role seems to dissolve them into nothing but the plot, especially if these characters are representations of real historical people. It will, then, be the presupposition of this investigation that characters do have a functionary role when it comes to the plot of a story, but that these characters can be experienced by the reader in ways that we experience real people in the real world.

The importance of this for hearing Mark cannot be overlooked. The presence of God with the audience of Mark’s narrative is communicated through the reading-hearing engagement. The explicit and implicit presentation of God in Mark takes place within the text of the narrative, but Mark’s God certainly cannot be bound by the text, for the presentation of God through the narrative lets loose the God of the narrative in the hearing of the audience. Thus, the God of Mark is not simply a plot

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<sup>71</sup> Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>72</sup> Joel Weinsheimer, “Theory of Character: *Emma*,” *Poetics Today* 1 (1979): 185-211.

<sup>73</sup> *Ibid.*, 210.

functionary. Mark's God is a character in the narrative who is experienced by the audience of the narrative through their hearing of the narrative.

### *Locating the Presentation of God in Mark*

In his book, *The Rhetoric of Fiction*, Wayne Booth opens with a chapter entitled *Telling and Showing*.<sup>74</sup> The author of a narrative, according to Booth, can either tell the reader something about a character or show the reader something about a character either through the point of view of the implied author or the point of view of another character. In telling the reader about a character, the implied author states that a character is "good" or "bad"; "beautiful" or "ugly." While this is seen as the most reliable form of characterisation, showing can be the most creative and requires the reader to be in tune with what is taking place in the narrative. For example, in a story a person may be depicted as stealing something that does not belong to him. The narrator may not explicitly state that the character is a thief, but may show that this is true. Of course, the reader must go to extra pains to make this determination, but the characterisation may be more impressionistic.

Literary critics also have pointed out that there are two basic ways of presenting characters. Closely related to Booth's telling and showing is what is known as direct definition and indirect presentation.<sup>75</sup> Direct definition is the more explicit of these two and can be seen when a direct reference is made concerning a character either by the narrator or by another character. What is said about the character defines the character. David Gowler has stated that, "Direct definition plays a critical part in characterisation, because it creates in the mind of the reader an explicit, authoritative, and static impression of a character."<sup>76</sup> Of course, as literary critics have suggested, there are degrees of reliability that need to be taken into

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<sup>74</sup> Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 3-20.

<sup>75</sup> See Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction* (London: Methuen, 1983), 59-68.

<sup>76</sup> Gowler, *Host*, 57.

account when evaluating what is said about a character.<sup>77</sup> For example, the narrator of a story generally has the highest degree of reliability, while the opponents of the protagonist may have the least.

Indirect presentation follows what Booth has called showing. By using indirect presentation, the implied author shows the characteristics of the character leaving the implied reader to wrestle with making a judgement. This indirect presentation is done in a number of ways. Actions are one way of indirect presentation. By portraying a character's actions, the narrative is asking the reader to draw conclusions concerning the character. Normally, a one-time action plays an important point in the redirection of a narrative. Repeated or habitual actions, on the other hand, let the reader know that the character is unchanging. Within this category of actions there are *acts of commission* (what a character does), *acts of omission* (what a character does not do, that he or she should), and *contemplated acts* (an act which is intended but is not carried out).<sup>78</sup> Speech is a second way of indirect presentation of character.<sup>79</sup> This speech could be that of the character, or that of another character concerning the character in question. Again, a degree of reliability must be considered when weighing this type of presentation. A third way of indirect presentation is that of the external appearance of the character.<sup>80</sup> How a person looks, or how he or she is dressed can be crucial to understanding how the narrative is indirectly presenting that character. The fourth category described by Rimmon-Kenan is that of environment.<sup>81</sup> This has to do with the character's physical surroundings and human environment.

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<sup>77</sup> Rimmon-Kenan, *Narrative Fiction*, 60.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>80</sup> *Ibid.*, 65.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*



Boris Uspensky has suggested that presentation of character, and hence, characterisation takes place on four different planes.<sup>82</sup> On the *spatial- temporal plane*, the actions of a given character are important. The *phraseological plane* refers to the speech of the character or other characters concerning that character. The *psychological plane* is where the thoughts of a character help the reader understand that character. The *ideological plane* refers to the beliefs and values of a character. For the reader to grasp the true nature of the character along any one of these planes, that reader must evaluate the point of view that is being presented to determine the degree of reliability. If the point of view is presented as untrue, then the reader is to reject that characterisation. Likewise, a point of view presented as true is to be accepted as reliable characterisation.<sup>83</sup>

To summarise our discussion of characters to this point, although characters do play roles in the plot, they can be experienced much like we experience real people. They are not mere words, but can be viewed as people. In apprehending these characters, we have suggested certain ways in which characters are presented in a narrative. The narrator may tell about the character, either through the direct definition of the narrator, or that of another character. As well, the character may be presented indirectly by the text showing the traits of that character. Direct definition is done along the phraseological plane when the narrator or implied author directly defines a character, while indirect presentation can take place on all four planes, by way of the actions, speech, thoughts, appearance, and environment of the character. As we will see in Mark's Gospel, the characterisation of God occurs only on the phraseological and spatial- temporal planes, either as direct definition or as indirect presentation.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Boris Uspensky, *A Poetics of Composition: The Structure of the Artistic Text and Typology of a Compositional Form* (trans. Valentina Zavarin and Susan Wittig; Berkley: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>84</sup> While I utilise methods used to discuss characters, I am not attempting in this study to discuss God primarily in literary terms such as "round" or "flat", or other terms used within the discipline of literary criticism. Rather, I am concerned to use a literary approach to the text primarily as a heuristic methodology for extracting where and how God is presented in the Markan narrative.



### **The Prospects of this Investigation**

To this point I have addressed the issue that will be investigated in this project. I also have discussed briefly the lack of study within this area. Further, I have laid out the methods to be used in this investigation. What remains, however, is to describe briefly the organization of this thesis, and to forecast the contributions of this investigation to the study of Mark.

In the following two chapters I offer a close reading of the Gospel, utilizing the methodology of how characters are presented in narratives to work through the narrative to discover where and how God is presented implicitly and explicitly as a character. The approach I will take is to read the Gospel from beginning to end, focusing on the process of reading that has been outlined in this chapter. My intention is to play the role of the first century listening audience by hearing the narrative progressively; allowing what has past in the story to influence what is present and future in the narrative. The aim of these two chapters, however, is not to give a full interpretation of Mark's Gospel. My goal is to demonstrate how the narrative presents God and how the audience understands this presentation.

In chapter four I relate the understanding of this characterisation of God with Mark's Christology. This of course will require a dialogue with Markan scholarship concerning the Christology of the Gospel. My concern in this chapter, however, is with the way Jesus is presented through the narrator's telling who Jesus is through Christological titles, and the way Jesus is presented through the narrator's showing who Jesus is via the narration of Jesus' actions and words. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the Markan Jesus is better understood in relation to the presentation of God, and thus the Christology of Mark is better understood as an aspect of the theology of Mark.

In chapter five I will relate the characterisation of God to the Gospel's understanding of discipleship. Discipleship also has been a major point of scholarly discussion on Mark. Thus, I will offer a summary of the debate and I will interact with scholarship on this topic. My analysis, however, will relate discipleship in

terms of who God is in the narrative. Scholars have tended to relate Christology with discipleship. While I do not want to discard that discussion altogether, I propose that the theology of the Gospel presents another basis for understanding the Gospel's view of discipleship. Discipleship is dependent on the Christology of the narrative. But discipleship is equally, and even more so, dependent on the presentation of God. I shall argue, then, that the discipleship community of Mark's narrative, that is to say the authorial audience, is drawn by the narrative to understand their lives of discipleship in relation not only to Jesus, but also, and primarily, in relation to the God of Jesus and Mark's narrative.

The final chapter will present a general summary of these findings and will offer a proposal of the effect this reading of the narrative might have had on a first century audience. The focus will be on the narrative's power to affect the listening audience and on their understanding of the presence of God in their hearing of the narrative.

## Chapter Two

### The Presentation of God in Mark 1:1-9:1

In the previous chapter I established the problem to be addressed in this thesis, that is a void in the study of God in the Gospel of Mark. As extensively discussed in that chapter, crucial to this investigation will be a number of signposts, or indicators that will help in our seeing Mark's presentation of God in the narrative. First, an obvious indicator will be God's actions in the story, whether these are explicit or implicit. By explicit I mean those points in the narrative where God is obviously an active character. By implicit I mean those points where God may be inferred as active character, either through the use of the divine passive, or through the actions of Jesus. Second, how the narrator or other characters in the story speak of God will indeed influence our analysis. At each juncture, however, the reliability of the narrator or the characters involved will be judged. We can, without reservation, state at this point that the narrator, and indeed the protagonist of the story, Jesus, are reliable voices that give the audience valuable information about God. Both the narrator and Jesus speak authoritatively throughout the narrative, and what either of them states concerning any issue is found to be true. Moreover, the narrator serves an omniscient role within the story, knowing even the internal thoughts of the characters.<sup>1</sup> The questions surrounding the reliability of characters then will focus on other characters in the story, namely the disciples, the unclean spirits, and the authorities.<sup>2</sup> Third, direct quotations from, allusions to, or images

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<sup>1</sup> For a discussion of the reliability and omniscience of the narrator see Meir Sternberg, *Poetics of Biblical Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987).

<sup>2</sup> In this discussion I will be using the generic terms "authorities" and "religious leaders" to refer to the scribes and Pharisees who are in conflict with Jesus. From a literary standpoint these groups represent collective character, i.e. they are to be treated as one character. Where there is distinction, however, between the groups, or where certain members of the groups are singled out as individual characters, then necessary adjustments will be made regarding terminology. For treatments of the role of the Jewish leaders in Mark see Michael Cook, *Mark's Treatment of the Jewish Leaders* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); Anthony Saldarini, "The Social Class of the Pharisees in Mark," in *The Social World of Formative Christianity and Judaism*, (ed. J. Neusner, et. al.; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 69-77; Elizabeth S. Malbon, "The Jewish Leaders in the Gospel of Mark: A Literary Study of Markan Characterization," *JBL* 108 (1989): 259-281; and Stephen Smith "The Role of Jesus' Opponents in the Markan Drama," *NTS* 35 (1989): 161-182.

reflective of the Old Testament will certainly be indispensable for our understanding of Mark's presentation of God.

There are two ways in which we could progress through this analysis. One way is to catalogue various characterisations of God under their respective headings. This, however, would require a bit of jumping about in the narrative, an action that indeed takes away from the intended way the Gospel was to be heard. A second method would be to work through the Gospel, highlighting, as we move along, those places where God is presented. In this way, each pericope under discussion could be heard within the context of the narrative flow of the story. Indeed, few would argue against the idea that Mark was written in order to be read in a linear fashion. Moreover, the first-time *hearer* of the Gospel would understand the narrative in a temporal sense, moving with the plot. To break up the sequence of Mark's Gospel, then, would violate the very process by which the audience heard and understood the story. Thus, I will proceed through the narrative from beginning to end, raising awareness of where God is presented in Mark's Gospel.

### Mark 1:1-15

The extent of Mark's prologue continues to be debated within New Testament scholarship. Scholars are mostly divided into two camps; those taking 1:1-13 as the prologue and those who see the introduction as including 1:14-15.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Those who see 1-13 as the prologue include C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), 33; B. H. M. G. M. Standaert, *L' evangile selon Marc* (Nijmegen: Stichting Studentenpers, 1978), 82-89; F. G. Lang, "Kompositionsanalyse des Markusevangeliums," *ZTK* 74 (1977): 1-24; Dietrich A. Koch, "Inhaltliche Gliederung und geographischer Aufriess im Markusevangelium," *NTS* 29 (1982-83): 157; Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 151; D. E. Nineham, *St. Mark* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1963), 55; William L. Lane, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1974), 39; Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: A&C Black, 1991), 27; Frank J. Matera, "The Prologue as the Interpretative Key to Mark's Gospel," *JSNT* 34 (1988): 3-21; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (trans. D. H. Madvig London: SPCK, 1971), 28-41.

Those scholars in favour of including verses 14-15 include Leander E. Keck, "The Introduction to Mark's Gospel," *NTS* 12 (1965-66): 352-370; Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Oliphants, 1976), 58; Sherman E. Johnson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: A&C Black, 1972), 23; Joachim Gnilka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zurich/ Neukirchen:

While it is not in the scope of this project to give an extensive case for choosing either option available, nor is it crucial to the topic at hand, I am more convinced by the arguments of those who view the prologue as comprising vv. 1-15.

In 1:1 the audience encounters the first use of Θεός, which is used here in relation to who Jesus is.<sup>4</sup> The implied author clearly states at the beginning that this narrative will be about Jesus Christ, Son of God (υἱοῦ θεοῦ).<sup>5</sup> From a literary critical standpoint we may propose that the narrator is setting the course for the

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Benzinger/ Neukirchener, 1978), 32; Robert A. Guelich, "The Beginning of the Gospel," *BR* 27 (1982): 5-15; idem. *Mark 1-8:26* (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), xxvii; O. J. F. Seitz, "Preparatio Evangelica in the Markan Prologue," *JBL* 82 (1963): 201-206; idem., "Gospel Prologues: A Common Pattern?" *JBL* 83 (1964): 262-268; M. Eugene Boring, "Mark 1:1-15 and the Beginning of the Gospel," *Semina* 52 (1990): 43-81; Paul J. Sankey, "Promise and Fulfillment: Reader- Response to Mark 1.1-15," *JSNT* 58 (1995): 3-18.

<sup>4</sup> For discussions on how 1:1 relates to the verses that immediately follow the prologue of Mark's Gospel, and the entire narrative itself, see the following: Boring, "Mark 1:1-15.," Robert Guelich, "The Gospel Genre," in *Das Evangelium und die Evangelien* (ed. P. Stuhlmacher; WUNT 28; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983), 183-219; Charles H. Giblym, "The Beginning of the Ongoing Gospel," in *The Four Gospels*. (eds. F. Van Segbroeck, C.M. Tuckett, G. Van Belle, & J. VerHeyden; Leuven: University Press, 1992), 2:975-985.

<sup>5</sup> There is difficulty in determining whether υἱοῦ θεοῦ is original to Mark 1:1. The textual evidence is divided with  $\aleph \Theta 28$  sy<sup>pal</sup> Iren<sup>gr</sup>, lat 1/3 Or<sup>gr</sup>, lat missing the phrase, and  $\aleph^1 B D L W$  pc Latt sy co Iren<sup>lat2</sup> including the words (Guelich, *Mark*, 6). Since the external evidence is not overwhelmingly convincing for inclusion or exclusion, we must turn to look at the internal evidence. The title has been shown to be important within Mark's Gospel. Although it appears in the form υἱοῦ θεοῦ here in 1:1 and later in the narrative at 15:39, there are other crucial points in the story where Son of God is implied (1:11; 3:11; 5:7; 9:7; 13:32; 14:61). Therefore one can see that the theme Son of God is important to Mark's narrative. Yet, since it is an important theme throughout the narrative, and indeed an important title in early Christianity, may we not see along with Tischendorf that the words were "inserted by over zealous piety"? (Quoted by J. Slomp, "Are the Words 'Son of God' in Mark 1.1 Original?," *BT* 28 [1977]: 146). Although it is the tendency within text critical circles to accept a shorter reading because scribes would be more likely to make additions to the text, rather than omissions (See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* [New York: United Bible Societies]: 62), it can also be pointed out that the omission of the phrase in some manuscripts may be due to homoioteleuton (See Taylor, *Mark*, 152). Since the phrase occurs within a series of genitives, it is quite possible that a scribe, seeing the similar endings, lost his place and inadvertently left out υἱοῦ θεοῦ. It appears, then, that both the external evidence and the internal evidence have some validity. Based on Mark's use of the phrase, however, it is more likely that the phrase is original to the Gospel.

See the following who accept the title as original in 1:1 based on its importance to Mark: Guelich, *Mark*, 6; Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: herder, 1976), 1:74, n1; Lane, *Mark*, 41; Anderson, *Mark*, 67; Taylor, *Mark*, 152; Cranfield, *Mark*, 38; Oscar Cullman, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 294. Those scholars arguing for a scribal addition of the phrase include Schweizer, *Mark*, 30; J. Slomp, "Are the Words 'Son of God' in Mark 1.1 Original?," 143-150; Peter Head, "A Text Critical Study of Mark 1.1: 'The Beginning of the Gospel of Jesus Christ'," *NTS* 37 (1991): 621-629.

audience in that he is establishing his evaluative point of view from the beginning.<sup>6</sup> This narrative is not simply a story of any man, but a story concerning “Jesus Christ, the Son of God.” In designating Jesus as such, however, the narrator is also telling the audience something about God. Simply put, we can propose that God is directly defined as the Father of Jesus. Though there is no miraculous birth narrative in Mark, as in Matthew and Luke, the audience at this point in the story is still left with the impression that Jesus is not the son of a human, but the Son of God, and therefore God is presented as the Father of Jesus. This initial designation does not fully explicate this relationship, however. Rather Son and Father are fully grasped by the audience as they hear the narrative whole.<sup>7</sup>

Mark 1:2-3 comprises a mixture of quotations from the Old Testament, which are attributed by the author to Isaiah. However, as is well known among Markan scholars, these references find their background in three different passages from the Old Testament. Mark 1:2b agrees almost verbatim with the LXX reading of Exodus 23:20.<sup>8</sup> Mark’s use of Malachi 3:1 in verse 2c is very close to the MT reading, changing the person from first to second, probably for the purpose of linking that verse to Jesus.<sup>9</sup> Finally, Mark uses the LXX reading of Isaiah 40:3 in 1:3, changing, however, the paths of our God (τρίβους τοῦ θεοῦ ἡμῶν) to his paths (τρίβους αὐτοῦ), again relating the Old Testament text to Jesus.

There have been various reasons proposed for Mark’s attribution of these statements to Isaiah, because they come from three different sources.<sup>10</sup> Some have suggested that there was already a collection of *testimonia* in circulation at the time

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<sup>6</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 56.

<sup>7</sup> This point is made by Marianne M. Thompson in *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: WJKP, 2000), 91.

<sup>8</sup> Exod 23:20a (LXX) reads καὶ Ἰδοὺ ἐγὼ ἀποστέλλω τὸν ἄγγελόν μου προώσπου σου.

<sup>9</sup> See Lane, *Mark*, 45.

<sup>10</sup> See the summary and critique of these views in Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus and Mark* (WUNT 88; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1997), 55-90.



the second Gospel was penned, which summarised Old Testament passages.<sup>11</sup> Closely related to this proposal, Joel Marcus has even suggested that the conflation of Exodus 23:20 and Malachi 3:1 already finds precedent within Jewish tradition, and that with this conflation Mark added Isaiah 40:3.<sup>12</sup> Marcus, following Guelich, goes on to argue that Mark's reason for bringing these verses together, and attributing them to the prophet Isaiah is due to more than his need to identify a source. Mark desires that his story of Jesus be "understood against the backdrop of Isaianic themes."<sup>13</sup> More specifically, Marcus sees the wilderness theme of Isaiah as important for the Markan narrative, especially because the emphasis in this Isaianic theme is the hope of eschatological salvation in the wilderness.<sup>14</sup> Marcus strengthens this argument by his reliance on P. Stuhlmacher, who proposes that the background of the New Testament term εὐαγγέλιον is in Deutero-Isaiah, particularly Isa 40:9.<sup>15</sup> Since Mark has introduced his narrative as a "Gospel," and has followed that introduction by naming Isaiah as the source of the quotation to follow, it is likely that the audience understands the Markan story against the themes of Isaiah.

If Marcus is correct in his thesis, then clearly Mark's use of these Old Testament passages and the attribution of them to Isaiah, are for the purpose of persuading the audience to understand the following narrative within the context of the eschatological hope found in Isaiah 40, and to see this hope coming to fulfilment.<sup>16</sup> The use of these quotations at this juncture in the story, indeed picks up the story of the past, and continues the hope begun at that former time in the time of

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<sup>11</sup> See especially Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Essays on the Semitic Background of the New Testament* (Missoula: Scholars' Press, 1974), 59-89; N. J. Hommes, *Het Testimoniaboek* (Amsterdam, 1935); Barnabas Lindars, *New Testament Apologetics* (London: SCM Press, 1961), 13-31; Schweizer, *Mark*, 28; Mary A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary- Historical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 241 n7.

<sup>12</sup> Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 13, 16.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 20; Watts also argues that Mark narrates his Gospel as the fulfilment of the long awaited New Exodus of Isaiah (See Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*).

<sup>14</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 26.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 18-19. See also Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 96-99.

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion of the context and theme of Isaiah 40 See Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 18-21.



Mark's audience. In appropriating the context of Isaiah in their understanding of Mark's beginning, the audience would understand that God is at work within Mark's story, fulfilling the promises of the past. The voice that cries out in Isaiah 40 proclaims that God is coming as ruler. Indeed, the very mention of the "way of the Lord," and the "highway for our God" presents to the listeners of the prophet the idea of God's very presence entering the world. By using Isaiah as the backdrop to the story, then, Mark invites the audience to comprehend God's presence and activity in the world. This, of course, will be strengthened in the narrative to come when the heavens are ripped apart, and God's voice is heard, and when Jesus proclaims that God's rule has arrived, an allusion to what was proclaimed in Isa 40:10. For the moment, however, the audience is left to grapple with the intricacies of the quotations used by Mark.

The first issue raised by the use of these quotations concerns the speaker. Who is the one who is sending the messenger? Clearly in the context of Exod 23, and here in the context of Mark it is God who is sending his messenger before "your face." We may safely assume with the majority of scholars that the *προσώπου σου* and the *ὁδόν σου* must refer to Jesus, and the messenger whose voice cries out in the wilderness must be John.<sup>17</sup> An interesting problem presents itself, however, in reading verse 3b. To whom does *κυρίου* refer? Clearly within the context of Isaiah 40, *κυρίου* refers to God. Yet does Mark mean to place this title now onto Jesus? Or, in not altering the phrase, does the term retain its Hebrew Bible referent, God? A

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<sup>17</sup> Contrary to this view Tolbert proposes that the "messenger" is not John, but Jesus, and that the second person singular pronoun *σου* refers not to Jesus, but to the readers of Mark's narrative. See Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 241-244. In response to the objection that *σου* cannot be taken as the readers because it is singular, Tolbert points to the reference to the singular "reader" in Mark 13:14 and, appealing to the preface of Luke's Gospel, proposes that it is plausible for Mark's narrative to have been intended for an individual. While Tolbert's argument is quite detailed, I am not convinced by it. Certainly one can safely say that Jesus is the messenger of good news throughout the narrative, but in 1:3 John is clearly the one to whom this designation is given. Moreover, her suggestion that Mark may be addressed to a single reader is dubious due to the lack of a designated addressee, as is found in Luke's narrative. Moreover, the consensus view that the Gospels were written to specific and identifiable communities has come under serious scrutiny by a handful of scholars. See Richard Bauckham, ed., *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

brief discussion of the arguments for either view will benefit our overall investigation of God in Mark 1:1-15.

Those who state that the term refers to Jesus rely on two basic arguments. First, the literary context demands that κυρίου refer to Jesus because the ὁδὸν σου of 2c clearly refers to Jesus, and τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου is parallel to that previous reference. A second argument suggests that since there is evidence that this name was used within Christian circles in reference to Jesus at the time of Mark's writing, then Jesus must be in view here. A third argument for reading the term with reference to Jesus, rests on Mark's slight change of Isaiah 40:3. As was stated previously, Mark has changed this passage from the LXX reading which has the "paths of our God" to read "his paths." Since Mark has made this change, proponents for reading κύριος here as referring to Jesus have argued that the change was made in order that τὴν ὁδὸν κυρίου would be parallel to τὰς τρίβους αὐτοῦ.<sup>18</sup>

There are, however, a few scholars who see the reference as pointing toward God, and not exclusively to Jesus. The argument they present basically rests on Mark's use of κύριος throughout the narrative. The term occurs in 1:3; 2:28; 5:19; 7:28; 11:3, 9; 12:9, 11, 29, 30, 36, 37; 13:20, 35. Klyne Snodgrass has stated that the term is never used in reference to Jesus except in 7:28, where the vocative form is found.<sup>19</sup> We might add to this point that the uses of the term in 11:3; 12:9; and 13:35 should be more likely translated by the common term master, and not by "Lord" in

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<sup>18</sup> For those who read κύριος as referring to Jesus see Guelich, *Mark*, 11; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 57; Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 36; A. E. J. Rawlison, *St. Mark* (London: Methuen & Co., LTD., 1925), 6; Krister Stendahl, *The School of St. Matthew and its use of the Old Testament*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 48; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 1:77; Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 40. Cranfield admits that it may refer to God.

<sup>19</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and their Adaptation in the New Testament," *JSNT* 8 (1980): 34. For others who understand the reference to God see Taylor, *Mark*, 153; Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 245-246; Dieter Lührmann, *Das Markusevangelium* (Tubingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1987), 34.

its theological sense. Yet these arguments in favour of reading the title as referring to God are not as overwhelming as may appear.

Joel Marcus, however, has made a third proposal. Marcus points out that there seems to be one path designated in 1:2-3, but under two different names, *σου* referring to Jesus, and *κυρίου*.<sup>20</sup> This, Marcus states, implies a “very close connection between Jesus and the Lord.”<sup>21</sup> He goes on to show that this close connection exists in other passages such as 2:28 and 12:36-37, where *κύριος* is used to speak of two different individuals. Marcus suggests that in 12:36-37 the designation of two “Lords” resembles somewhat the designation between “your way” and “the way of the Lord” found in 1:2-3.<sup>22</sup> He concludes that these references may be intended to combine “a recognition of the separateness of the two figures with a recognition of their inseparability.”<sup>23</sup> In other words, “Mark thus establishes an identity between the two ways, that of Jesus and that of the Lord, without simply identifying Jesus with God.”<sup>24</sup> The way, then, “is both God’s own way and the way of Jesus.”<sup>25</sup>

What then is the narrator telling the audience concerning God by stating that the way of the Lord is God’s own way? The narrative has already implied the context in which the audience must understand the meaning of the way of the Lord, and that we have concluded is within the Isaianic theme of victory. The indirect presentation then of the Lord is one designating God as active in the sending of his agent Jesus to obtain the eschatological victory promised in the past. As God has been seen as active in sending the messenger, so God is seen here as promising to

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<sup>20</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 38.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 39.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 40-41.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 41. Boring states, “The *κύριος* terminology is sometimes intentionally ambiguous, understood at one level by the characters in the narrative, and at a ‘higher’ (or ‘deeper’) level by Mark’s Christian reader.” M. Eugene Boring, “Markan Christology: God-Language for Jesus?” *NTS* 45 (1999): 452.

enter into the narrative in order to go the way of victory. The way of the Lord, as well as being the way of the Son, is God's way, which God will take in entering the world of the narrative. Thus, Mark begins to show both an inseparability as well as a distinction between God and Jesus which will characterise the narrative throughout.

Vernon Robbins has pointed out the logical progression of the next verse concerning the appearance of John the Baptist.<sup>26</sup> Yet again there is no miraculous birth narrative surrounding the coming of John such as Luke portrays. Rather, God has proclaimed that he is sending his messenger, and then the messenger appears. Since this verse follows directly from God's proclamation that he is sending his messenger, the hearers understand Mark to be indicating that the source of John's coming and preaching is not John himself, but God, who is bringing to pass that which has been promised.<sup>27</sup> Hugh Anderson has also pointed out that the verb γίνομαι is a Semitism with an Old Testament background which "re-echoes the notion that John's emergence is in accordance with the divine will and purpose."<sup>28</sup> Again, God is viewed as active character in the narrative, having fulfilled the promise to send out God's messenger who preaches repentance, a turning back to God.<sup>29</sup>

Mark 1:9-11 presents a most crucial point in the narrative where God is clearly a character in the story. Though God is not visible to the other characters in the story, the voice of God is heard by Jesus, the beloved Son, and is to be heard by the hearers of Mark's Gospel. Upon Jesus' baptism, Mark tells the audience that the heavens were "torn apart" (σχιζομένου). While the other synoptic evangelists use the softer term ἀνοίγω, appropriately translated "open," Mark chooses to use a verb that is more dramatic and impressionistic. The text is at work attempting to tear open

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<sup>26</sup> Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 77.

<sup>27</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 18; See also E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium Des Markus* (MeyK 2:Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 12-13 n. 4.

<sup>28</sup> Anderson, *Mark*, 69; Cf. Taylor, *Mark*, 154.

<sup>29</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 19.

the imagination of the audience.<sup>30</sup> In making this point, Donald Juel suggests that the audience may understand this ripping of the heavens as bringing about irreparable damage to the heavens.<sup>31</sup> Juel's point is that the barriers between heaven and earth are now ripped open, and therefore, "Mark's narrative is about the intrusion of God into the world that has become alien territory."<sup>32</sup> God will not be closed off from the narrative world of Mark's Gospel, but has entered that world in order to go the "way of the Lord", a way of victory. The audience, at this point, would understand God's active involvement in the narrative. The ripping open of the heavens is a theophany further establishing that God is active in fulfilling what had been promised.<sup>33</sup>

But what are we to make of the phrase τὸ πνεῦμα ὡς περιστερὰν καταβαῖνον εἰς αὐτόν? While some have proposed various interpretations of the dove, others have shown that the descent of the dove in the context of the waters likely reflects the imagery of the Spirit of God hovering over the waters in Genesis 1:2.<sup>34</sup> Since the dove is associated with the Spirit in the context of Mark 1:9-11 it is better to accept this view. Hence, God is not only seen as active in the opening of the heavens, God is also active in sending the Spirit of God onto the Son.

While the first two signs of the theophany of 9-11 are important, it is the voice from heaven that serves as the climax.<sup>35</sup> Though it has been debated as to whether this is a private theophany to which only Jesus is privy over against other characters, the hearers of Mark's narrative are certainly intended to hear the voice, as

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<sup>30</sup> Donald Juel, *A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 34.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 36. On the apocalyptic image of the ripping of the heavens see Ezek 1:1; Acts 7:56; Rev 19:11; 2 Bar 22:1; T. Levi 2:6; 5:1; 18:6. This coming of God answers the prophet Isaiah's call for God to rend the heavens and come down (Isa 64:1). See Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 102-108. God's coming, then, can be seen in the descent of the Spirit, for God's actions in the narrative are carried out through God's Spirit empowering God's Son.

<sup>33</sup> Schweizer, *Mark*, 41.

<sup>34</sup> See Taylor, *Mark*, 161 and Christopher Rowland, *The Open Heaven: A Study of Apocalyptic in Judaism and Early Christianity* (London: SPCK, 1982), 362.

<sup>35</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 49.

well as understand who is speaking.<sup>36</sup> As important as the voice is to the narrative, the content of what is said is of utmost importance. Echoing what the narrator has said concerning Jesus, God declares Jesus ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός, again establishing for the audience a special relationship between God and Jesus.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, God proclaims to the Son, and the hearers of Mark's narrative, that God is pleased with the activity of the Son in his submission to baptism.<sup>38</sup>

The baptismal scene, therefore, is crucial to the audience's understanding of God's action in the narrative. As God has been seen as faithfully sending forth the messenger before Jesus, so God is seen as faithfully acknowledging the obedience of the Son. God is not shut out from the narrative world of Mark, but enters into that world as an actor and announces to the audience who Jesus is.<sup>39</sup> In doing so, God not only proclaims that Jesus is the Son of the One God of Israel<sup>40</sup>, God more clearly defines God's own role as the Father who is pleased with the Son. This event, then, establishes for Mark's audience the context in which they are to comprehend Jesus' ministry in Mark's Gospel.

God's activity continues in the next scene as Mark tells his audience that immediately (εὐθύς) the Spirit, that is the same Spirit which came upon Jesus, threw (ἐκβάλλει) Jesus into the wilderness. Again, God is actively involved in the narrative, as Jesus does not take it upon himself to go into the wilderness, but is

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<sup>36</sup> On the difference between the voice which speaks to Jesus, a direct voice from God, and the *bath qol*, the indirect voice of God from heaven given to Israel after the prophets, see C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1958), 39-40; Carl R. Kazmierski, *Jesus, The Son of God: A Study of the Markan Tradition and its Redaction by the Evangelist* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 1979), 36-37; Lohmeyer, *Markus*, 24.

<sup>37</sup> Gundry states (*Mark*, 49) that though ἀγαπητός means "beloved", it also implies "only". See Gundry, 52 as well for a discussion of the debate surrounding whether this is an allusion to Gen 22.

<sup>38</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 53; Marcus has pointed out that allusions to Ps 2:7 and Is. 42:1 are given in this scene. See Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 51.

<sup>39</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 60.

<sup>40</sup> Boring, "Markan Christology," 456.



instead sent by the Spirit of God into battle with Satan.<sup>41</sup> The force of the narrative clearly demonstrates that the purpose for this casting of the Son into the wilderness is so that the beloved Son will be tested and proven faithful. God then continues to be active in the narrative, even if this action involves the testing of the beloved Son.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, in leading the Son by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted, God expresses trust in the Son. It is not so that the Son will fail that the Spirit casts him into the wilderness. Rather the intention is that the Son will prove his faithfulness to the Father.<sup>43</sup> The audience knows full well the pleasure the Father has for the Son. But in the Markan narrative, this pleasure must be tested through the testing of the Son.<sup>44</sup> Yet God does not withdraw all protection from the Son. Although the presence of wild beasts represents a continued threat to the Son, the presence of angels, God's servants who are sent by God to intercede and assist those who are faithful<sup>45</sup>, indicates that God has not abandoned the Son, but remains active in providing protection for the Beloved.<sup>46</sup>

Verses 14-15 of the Markan prologue continue to offer the audience a plethora of language that presents God. Firstly, as God is indirectly presented in the sending of John (1:2-3), so God may also be viewed as indirectly presented in the handing over of John. There is no subject explicitly mentioned for the verb παραδοθῆναι in 1:14. Yet, as Cranfield has pointed out, "the use of the general term, particularly in the passive, could suggest that behind the schemes and actions

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<sup>41</sup> Schweizer, *Mark*, 42; Jeffrey B. Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* (JSNTSup 112; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 64.

<sup>42</sup> For a discussion of God's activity in testing as found in ancient Jewish and Christian texts see Susan Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 19-49.

<sup>43</sup> Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus*, 64; Birger Gerhardsson, *The Testing of God's Son (Matt. 4.1-11 and Par.)* (Lund: Gleerup, 1966), 27-28.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Job 1-2 where Job is declared by God as "Blameless and upright", but who God allows Satan to test to prove his faithfulness. See Garrett, *Temptations of Jesus*, 56.

<sup>45</sup> See Philip G. Davis, "Divine Agents, Mediators, and New Testament Christology," *JTS* ns. 45 (1994): 485 and Ulrich Mauser, *Christ in the Wilderness* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 101. Cf. 1 En 89:76; Dan 6:22; 1 En 90:14; Pr Azar 26; 2 Macc 15:22-23; 4 Macc 4:10. For a brief discussion on the possible views regarding why the presence of "angels" and "wild beasts" see Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus*, 65-69.

<sup>46</sup> See Garrett sees this as being in accordance with Ps 91:9-14; see *The Temptations of Jesus*, 57.



of men in relation to John *God's* purposing and doing were to be recognised.”<sup>47</sup>

Secondly, Jesus is said to have gone into Galilee preaching τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>48</sup> The issue that immediately arises for the hearer concerns what is to be made of this unusual phrase. Are we to understand this good news as being about God, or as good news from God? L. Keck proposed that the phrase be taken both subjectively and objectively. In other words, Jesus went into Galilee preaching the God-given good news about God.<sup>49</sup> We may add to this that the previous verses in Mark have shown that God is the initiator of what takes place in the narrative, therefore indicating that the good news which is preached by Jesus is from God, and that the message at the centre of Jesus' preaching is that the good news is about what God is doing, i.e. entering into the world.

This presentation of God is further seen in what Mark tells us Jesus said in his preaching. First, Mark states that Jesus said, “The time has been fulfilled” (πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς). Again we encounter the use of a passive verb indicating a possible reference to God's activity. In this indirect presentation, God is pictured as the one who controls time and the one who brings this time to fulfilment.<sup>50</sup> As Lane has stated, “God begins to act in a new and decisive way, bringing his promise of ultimate redemption to the point of fulfilment.”<sup>51</sup> In the second statement of Jesus

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<sup>47</sup> Cranfield, *St. Mark*, 62, italics his. See also Guelich, *Mark*, 42; Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium Des Markus*, 29; Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 1:101; Bruce Chilton, *God in Strength: Jesus' Announcement of the Kingdom* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 36; Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist: Studies on the Redaction History of the Gospel*, trans. R. Harrisville, et. al. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 38-40.

<sup>48</sup> Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 64) has sufficiently shown that τοῦ θεοῦ is to be preferred over τῆς βασιλείας which is found in A D W pm lat sy<sup>p</sup> due to the probability that a copyist sought to conform the phrase to verse 15.

<sup>49</sup> Keck, “Introduction to Mark's Gospel,” 359.

<sup>50</sup> It is not relevant at this point in the discussion as to whether πεπλήρωται ὁ καιρὸς refers to a specific point in time, or a span of time. This discussion will be left until our attention turns to treating Mark's eschatology in light of his presentation of God. For issues relating to the debate, however, see Joel Marcus, “The Time has been Fulfilled! (Mark 1.15),” in *Apocalyptic and the New Testament: Essays in honor of J. Louis Martyn* (eds. J. Marcus & M. Soards; JSNTSup 24: Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 49-68, and the literature cited there.

<sup>51</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 64.

in 1:15, he announces that the kingdom of God has drawn near. While the debate continues over what Jesus meant by his use of the expression kingdom of God<sup>52</sup>, most scholars have pointed out that the expression does not primarily indicate locality, but that Jesus' use is more dynamic.<sup>53</sup> In other words, Jesus is not first and foremost referring to a realm or sphere, but to the kingly rule of God. This meaning of the phrase has been sufficiently defended by the work of Bruce Chilton. Chilton argues that the view of the kingdom of God in the preaching of Jesus is similar to the understanding of the kingdom in the Targum of Isaiah and shows that the view of God's rule is one of saving power and self-revelation.<sup>54</sup> Moreover, the "emphasis is on the dynamic, personal presence of God."<sup>55</sup> Following Chilton and others then, we propose that through Jesus' proclamation that the kingdom has drawn near, Mark is indicating that the God whose promises are coming to fulfilment, and who has entered the world by way of the ripping of the heavens, is now actively ruling in that world. As Marcus has paraphrased verse 15, "The time of dominion of Satan has been fulfilled, and the kingly power of God has drawn near."<sup>56</sup> The arrival of the faithful and beloved Son thus ushers in the rule of God on the earth, and begins the way of victory which God will win through the agency of the Son.

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<sup>52</sup> For a survey of scholarship relating to Jesus' use of the phrase kingdom of God see Bruce Chilton, "The Kingdom of God in Recent Discussion," in *Studying the Historical Jesus: Evaluations of the State of Current Research* (eds. B. Chilton & C.A. Evans; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1994), 255-280; Mark Saucy, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus* (Dallas: Word, 1997); W. Willis, ed., *The Kingdom of God in Twentieth-Century Interpretation* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1987).

<sup>53</sup> Those taking the dynamic view of the phrase include, Chilton, *God in Strength*, 283-284; idem, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1996); Lane, *Mark*, 64-65; Joel Marcus, "Entering into the Kingly Power of God," *JBL* 107 (1988): 663-675. Those scholars seeing the kingdom of God as referring to a realm or sphere include: Schweizer, *Mark*, 46; S. Aalen, "Reign and House in the Kingdom of God in the Gospels," *NTS* 8 (1962): 215-240. Of course, accepting the phrase as conveying primarily a dynamic meaning does not preclude us from understanding the spatial element this phrase also conveys.

<sup>54</sup> Chilton, *God in Strength*, 283.

<sup>55</sup> Chilton, "The Kingdom of God in Recent Discussion," 258.

<sup>56</sup> Marcus, "The Time has been Fulfilled!" 56.

We have shown through our discussion of Mark's prologue that God plays a crucial role.<sup>57</sup> God is presented as "Father" and protector of Jesus, sender of John, and the κύριος whose way of victory is prepared. Moreover, God is presented as the source and subject of the good news which is preached by Jesus, who proclaims that God has brought about the fulfilment of time, entered into the world, and is actively ruling in that world. The hearing of the prologue is within the context of the Old Testament promises of God's coming victory.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, we must point out that Mark's prologue sets the theological tone for the rest of his Gospel. God will not be shut out of the narrative world of Mark's Gospel, and the narrator seeks to establish clearly God's point of view from the beginning, thus drawing the audience's attention to hear the narrative not only as the story of Jesus, but also as the story of God.

Furthermore, since it is readily accepted that the beginning or introduction of a narrative, whether ancient or modern, is important for the audience's understanding, we may propose the following conclusions about Mark's prologue, and its effect on the listening audience.<sup>59</sup> First, following Boring, the prologue serves to introduce the audience to the main character(s) of the story.<sup>60</sup> John is introduced into the narrative, and then Jesus, the protagonist, is brought onto the scene. Yet the first character to be shown as active in the narrative is God. It is God who initiates the story, and it is God who sends forth the messenger who will prepare the way of Jesus and God. Therefore, the activities of John and Jesus are wrapped up

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<sup>57</sup> On the importance of the frequency of references to God's agency in the prologue of Mark see Paul Danove, "The Narrative Function of Mark's Characterization of God," *NovT* 43 (2001): 25-26.

<sup>58</sup> R. H. Lightfoot, remarks that the first few verses of Mark contain a backward function, recalling "certain beliefs of the Jews about the expected supreme intervention of their God in the events of the world's history." (See *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950], 19.) Frank Kermode (*The Genesis of Secrecy: On the Interpretation of Narrative* [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press], 134) has pointed out that Mark's narrative "stands between past and immediately future time, establishing a continuity which makes sense only in terms of that which interrupts it."

<sup>59</sup> For the importance of "beginnings" in narratives see the articles in D. E. Smith, ed. *How Gospels Begin. Semeia* 52 (1990). On the significance of the Markan prologue for setting the stage for the hearers of Mark see the lengthy discussion in Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 53-121. See also Matera, "Prologue."

<sup>60</sup> Boring, "Mark 1:1-15," 61-63.

in the activity of God. Second, although Jesus is the main protagonist of Mark's story, and questions continually surround his identity, Mark's narrative implies a re-identification of who God is.<sup>61</sup> The questions that surround Jesus in the subsequent narrative of Mark all surround his identity, and the source of that identity and authority. Yet while the characters in the story seem bewildered by Jesus, the audience has the privilege of having heard the prologue, where they are told who this Jesus is. More importantly, as we have pointed out earlier, above and beyond the narrator, it is God who proclaims Jesus' identity, therefore giving the hearers the inside view. Thus, in the subsequent activities and teachings of Jesus in Mark's narrative, God may be in the process of being redefined for the audience. The God of Mark is clearly the God of the Hebrew Bible, but in the coming, teaching and activity of Jesus, God is viewed as doing something new in the world. God's entrance in the world, then, may be taken to be a new revelation to God's people of the coming rule of God. The prologue then serves as the "hermeneutical key" for the audience's understanding of the relationship between God and Jesus. Following this, a third important point can be made concerning the prologue. Boring and others have shown that the prologue introduces themes that are found throughout the rest of the narrative. Yet, the prologue also gives to the hearers the hermeneutical key for understanding the rest of the narrative. As the audience moves with the narrative, they will continually be thrown back into the prologue to gather information that helps them make sense of the subsequent story.

### **Mark 1:21-28**

The confrontation between Jesus and the unclean spirits in Mark 1:21-28 follows closely Jesus' previous encounter with Satan in the wilderness. Although Jesus has proclaimed that God has come to reign, this does not necessarily mean that the end of demonic influence has come. On the contrary, Mark is keen to show his readers that evil still abounds in the world. Yet, Jesus is pictured here as the one who

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<sup>61</sup> Ibid., 63.

not only teaches with authority, but also as the one who acts with authority. As Gundry has pointed out, these two depictions of Jesus are not to be seen as being set over against each other, but rather as supporting each other.<sup>62</sup> The correlation of these two, then, presents the context in which the audience is to understand the exorcism.<sup>63</sup> As Jesus has preached that the kingdom of God has drawn near, so the audience understands that this exorcism is a result of the coming of God's reign on the earth, i.e. "God's reign itself in operation in the defeat of Satan in people's lives."<sup>64</sup> Moreover, as Jesus has been seen as the one who has been empowered by the Holy Spirit at baptism and thrown by that same Spirit into the wilderness to face Satan, so this Jesus is seen as the "Holy One of God" over against the unclean spirits. The audience, therefore, in reflecting back onto the prologue, would certainly understand the importance Mark places on the authority Jesus possesses, authority to teach and exorcise. It is then the audience, and not the crowd, who understand full well that the source of Jesus' authority is God. The crowd questions from where this authority has come.<sup>65</sup> This is made clearer through the use of the phrase ἡλθες ἀπολέσαι ἡμᾶς. Gundry has suggested that this may signify a divine commission.<sup>66</sup> Since Jesus has been portrayed as coming from God, battling Satan, and preaching the coming reign of God, then the unclean spirits themselves understand full well that God has commissioned Jesus to act in the destruction of evil. Thus they recognise Jesus as the one sent from God, and recognise God as the sender of Jesus.

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<sup>62</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 74.

<sup>63</sup> On the programmatic character of this passage for Mark's Gospel see J. C. Iwe, *Jesus in the Synagogue of Capernaum: The Pericope and Its Programmatic Character for the Gospel of Mark. An Exegetical-Theological Study of Mk 1:21-28* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1999).

<sup>64</sup> See Graham Twelftree, "ΕΙΔΕ...ΕΓΩ ΕΚΒΑΛΛΩ ΤΑ ΔΑΙΜΟΝΙΑ...." in *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus*. Vol. 6. (ed. C. Blomberg & D. Wenham;; Sheffield: JSOT, 1986), 389.

<sup>65</sup> A similar point is made by Bruce Chilton, "Exorcism and History: Mark 1:21-28," in *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus*, 257.

<sup>66</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 76.

These unclean spirits, moreover, understand full well the relationship between Jesus and God. Jesus is no mere divine man sent from God, but is instead ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>67</sup> As has been pointed out, the use here may be to place in contrast the unclean spirit over against the one who has been empowered by the Holy (ἅγιος) Spirit.<sup>68</sup> Yet, we must also see in this title an emphasis on the relationship between Jesus and God.<sup>69</sup> Jesus has already been designated as Son of God by the narrator in 1:1, and by God in 1:11. Here, again, the relationship of Jesus to God is pictured for the audience.

What then can be stated concerning the presentation of God as character in 1:21-28? First, God is indirectly presented in the exorcism scene as the source of Jesus' authority. While not specifically stated, the implications of the passage, i.e. the link of Jesus' teaching with the exorcism and the question of the crowd, are meant to lead the hearers of the Gospel to reflect on the source of this authority and conclude that it is God. Moreover, since God has already been presented as coming to rule as King, the audience is to understand the destruction of the unclean spirits as a sign of this reign. Added to this, the narrative again presents God as character in terms of the relationship between God and Jesus. Though God is not presented here as the Father of Jesus, the special relationship is emphasised with God being seen as the one who sends and sanctifies Jesus as the one with authority.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> For a brief discussion of hypotheses on how this phrase came to be in Mark 1:24 see Gundry, *Mark*, 82-83.

<sup>68</sup> James M. Robinson, *The Problem of History in Mark* (London: SCM Press, 1957), 35-36.

<sup>69</sup> Ernest Best, *The Temptation and the Passion: Markan Soteriology* (SNTSMS 12: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 16.

<sup>70</sup> Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity* (London: Lutterworth Press, 1969), 232.



### Mark 2:1-3:6

Mark 2:1-12 is the first in a series of pericopes ending in 3:6 which picture Jesus in conflict with the religious authorities.<sup>71</sup> The conflict that ensues in 2:1-12 involves a group of scribes reacting within themselves to Jesus' pronouncement of forgiveness to a paralytic who has been lowered down to Jesus by his friends. Jesus, impressed by the faith of these friends, pronounces to the paralytic, "Son, your sins are forgiven." The reaction of the scribes is one of outrage, if only narrated as internal. These scribes, keepers of the law, certainly take Jesus' words as blasphemous and, through a rhetorical question, rightly claim that only God can forgive sins. Their thoughts concerning the God who forgives, and Mark's use of εἷς ὁ θεός (2:7) may induce the audience to hear in their words a reflection on the *Shema*.<sup>72</sup>

To see the presentation of God, we must first understand Jesus' use of the passive ἀφίενται as a divine passive used in order to avoid using the divine name.<sup>73</sup> By doing this Jesus is not only claiming to offer forgiveness to the man, but he is also implying that God has forgiven the sins of the man. Again, as in 1:2-3, there seems to be a blurring of the activity of Jesus and God.<sup>74</sup> In his response to the internal objections of the religious leaders, Jesus does not claim to be God in the strictest sense, but instead claims that the Son of Man has authority on earth to

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<sup>71</sup> For a detailed literary analysis of 2:1-3:6 see Joanna Dewey, *Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure and Theology in Mark 2:1-3:6* (SBLDS 48; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980).

<sup>72</sup> Deut 6:4 (LXX) reads \* Ἀκουε, Ἰσραὴλ κύριος ὁ θεὸς ἡμῶν κύριος εἷς ἐστίν. See Joel Marcus, "Authority to Forgive Sins upon the Earth: The *Shema* in the Gospel of Mark," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (eds. C.A. Evans & W.R. Stegner; JSNTSup 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 198-211.

<sup>73</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, (London: SCM Press LTD, 1971), 1:9, 11 n.2; Lane, *Mark*, 94.

<sup>74</sup> See Watts (*Isaiah's New Exodus*, 173) who states that the forgiveness given by God through Jesus "is strikingly consistent with Yahweh's pardoning of sin as a 'sign' of the INE." He further suggests, following Barry Blackburn, that this text assimilates Jesus to God. See Barry Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Markan Miracle Tradition: A Critique of the Theios Aner Concept as an Interpretative Background of the Miracle Traditions Used by Mark* (WUNT 2, 40; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991), 139.



forgive sins, authority, which the audience knows, has been invested in him by God. The hearers of the Gospel, then, are privileged in that the prior narrative, particularly the prologue, has shown that Jesus' preaching and actions find their source of authority in God, the one God. God is the one who has sent Jesus, and part of that mission is to bring God's forgiveness. Moreover, in response to the healing, which Jesus signifies as the proof of his authority on earth to forgive sins, the people rightly are amazed and glorify God, thus viewing what has taken place as an act of God. Hence, although the audience understands Jesus' authority to heal and forgive, it is God to whom the narrative points as healer and forgiver. Jesus is seen as the agent of that healing and forgiveness.<sup>75</sup>

The next point in the controversy narrative where God is presented occurs in Jesus' words, "The days will come when the bridegroom will be taken away (ἀπαρθῇ)" (2:20). In response to the Jewish leaders' question concerning why Jesus and his disciples do not fast, Jesus speaks in cloaked language about himself and his future.<sup>76</sup> Again, he uses the divine passive<sup>77</sup>, indicating that God is behind the departure of the figure of whom he speaks. Clearly Jesus means to imply that he himself is the bridegroom and that God is the one who will take away the bridegroom from those of the wedding party. Thus, the audience is presented with the first allusion to the subsequent death of Jesus, and the activity of God behind his death.<sup>78</sup>

The controversy over the disciples plucking grain on the Sabbath (2:23-28) gives the audience the next hint of the presentation of God in Mark's Gospel. In this

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<sup>75</sup> On the linking of healing and forgives that is reflected in this Markan scene see Lane, Mark, 94, who lists 2 Chr 7:14; Pss 103:3; 147:3; Isa 19:22; 38:17; 57:18f; Ps 41:4; Jer 3:22; Hos 14:4.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 108.

<sup>77</sup> Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 1:11.

<sup>78</sup> There seems to be a tension in Mark's narrative concerning the actions of God in the handing over of Jesus to death, and the actions of humans as those who betray Jesus and kill him. At various places in which Jesus speaks of his death in Mark, he implies God's activity as well as God's will in his death, and the evil motives and intentions of humans in the suffering and death. The audience, then, must be prepared to hold the two sides of the tension together, understanding that Jesus' death is a result of the evil intentions of humans as well the will and activity of God. Of course, we may suggest that this fits into the larger theme in Mark of contrasting the "things of humans" with the "things of God."

conflict, the Jewish leaders are again concerned over the actions of Jesus' disciples. Since it was the responsibility of the teacher to control his students, Jesus is the one to whom these leaders address their concern over this activity being conducted on the Sabbath. Jesus, however, answers their criticism by reminding them that when David and his men were hungry they went into the house of God and partook of the *shewbread*, an act that was unlawful.<sup>79</sup> Yet Jesus' response runs beyond a reference to this story and refers to the creation event when "the Sabbath was made (ἐγένετο) for man." Again, clearly using the divine passive, Jesus points to the most sacred of days as having been created by God for the purpose of humanity.<sup>80</sup> Stating again his own authority, this time over the Sabbath, Jesus redefines the purpose of the Sabbath. While the characters and the audience understand that God is the Creator, and Jesus substantiates their understanding through the divine passive, he himself claims to be "Lord" (κύριος) of the Sabbath, a position which God alone holds. Yet much like his claim to have authority to forgive sins in the episode of 2:1-12, Jesus does not intend to take God's place as master of the Sabbath, but acts on behalf of God on earth. God has not been removed from God's authoritative position over the Sabbath. Rather, the authority of God has now been given to Jesus, the Son of Man, who states the original purpose for which God had created the Sabbath. The audience is left to understand that Jesus and his disciples are free to pluck the grain on the Sabbath because God created the Sabbath for the good of humans and because God's authority over the Sabbath has been imputed to Jesus.

Mirroring somewhat the pericope of 2:1-12, Mark 3:1-6 again places Jesus in a situation in which a healing is needed.<sup>81</sup> Instead of a fully paralysed man

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<sup>79</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 122.

<sup>80</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 142. It is not necessary, of course, that ἐγένετο be taken as a divine passive in order to understand God as the Creator of the Sabbath. This would have been understood by the audience without the presence of the passive verb. However, the use of the passive intensifies this idea.

<sup>81</sup> See Dewey, *Markan Public Debate*, 100-101 for a discussion of the similarities between 2:1-12 and 3:1-6.

approaching Jesus, however, the man that is in the synagogue is paralysed only in his hand. The Jewish leaders look on to see if Jesus might heal the man on the Sabbath. Calling the man forward, Jesus again addresses the leaders with a question over whether it is better to save a life or to kill. They are left silent and Jesus responds by commanding the man to stretch forth his hand. Upon obeying this command the man is healed. But can we establish that God is presented in this scene? An analysis of the language used in this short passage will lead us to answer in the affirmative.

We have already seen in 2:1-12 that Jesus has the authority on earth to command divine healing, as implied in his words concerning his authority to forgive sins on the earth and his subsequent healing of the paralytic, thereby proving that authority. We determined that it was God who had invested that authority in Jesus and therefore God is the background agent of healing. In 3:1-6 we again encounter a healing narrative, and as an audience who has heard 2:1-12, we come to this healing knowing Jesus exercises delegated authority. Moreover, from the previous healing the audience understands that healing in relation to God's forgiveness. In 3:1-6 then, the hearers again encounter Jesus as agent of God who bestows healing and forgiveness, but they know that it is by God's authority that this is done.

The pericopae of 2:1-3:6 then present God indirectly as the one who forgives and heals, and the one in whom the destiny of Jesus rests, as well as the one who has created the Sabbath. Moreover, this is the first point in the Gospel where Jesus speaks authoritatively about the things of God with those in whom he is in conflict. In each of the scenes of this section of Mark, however, Jesus' actions are understood in light of God's authority. God is standing behind the actions and teachings of Jesus, who by the authority invested to him by God, teaches and acts as God's agent on earth.



### Mark 3:7-35

The next direct reference to God is found in 3:11, where Jesus is confronted by many who have come out to him to be cured of their diseases. Among those in the crowd were the demon-possessed, who sought freedom from the unclean spirits. It is these spirits who act to reinforce for the audience the identity of Jesus. As both the narrator and God have declared Jesus as Son of God, so the unclean spirits affirm Jesus as God's son. These evil spirits are not part of the human world, and therefore they know full well the nature of Jesus and his mission. The emphatic tone of Mark's terminology helps the hearers to understand that "*whenever* the unclean spirits saw him, they fell down before him and shouted 'You are the Son of God'."<sup>82</sup> Their acknowledgement of Jesus as God's Son, however, not only identifies and reinforces for the audience the identity of Jesus, but it also presents God as Father and authenticator of Jesus, indicating once again a special relationship between Jesus and the one who has sent him.

After Jesus calls those who will follow him, he again encounters conflict from the scribes who now accuse him of "having Beelzebub" and of using the power of the ruler of the demons to cast out demons. Jesus' response to this accusation exposes the absurdity of their indictment, as if Satan could be divided against himself and survive.<sup>83</sup> Then, through a brief parable, he tells them precisely what is the destiny for the ruler of the demons: his house will be plundered. Yet our concern is with what Jesus says next concerning the forgiveness of sins and blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Jesus begins his saying by declaring, "people will be forgiven their sins." What is crucial to our understanding is that Jesus again uses the passive ἀφεθήσεται, this time in a future tense. Resembling somewhat his use in the healing of the paralytic in 2:1-12, Jesus is again acknowledging that it is God who is the forgiver of sins. Moreover, as implied in the next phrase, God is the one who

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<sup>82</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 158, italics his.

<sup>83</sup> Ibid., 173.

does not give forgiveness to those who blaspheme against the Holy Spirit, since they are guilty of an eternal sin against God. To understand the seriousness of such a charge, however, we need to develop further what Jesus means by blasphemy against the Holy Spirit.

Max Turner has defined the role of the Holy Spirit in the Gospels as “a referring expression for the power and presence of God in action, especially as the means of God’s self-revelation.”<sup>84</sup> I have already noted the Spirit’s portrayal previously in Mark where God sends forth his Spirit to empower Jesus at the moment of his baptism. I showed how important that passage was to the presentation of God in the narrative, and how the Spirit is an expression of God as character. We can, therefore, propose that Jesus’ statement here in Mark 3 concerns the conscious rejection of God’s revelation in the life and ministry of Jesus. The scribes, in their earnest attempt to cast a shadow of evil on Jesus, have in essence rejected what God is doing, and hence have they blasphemed against the Spirit of God.<sup>85</sup> They have denied the authority of Jesus and, consequently the one the audience knows as the source of that authority, God.

The hearers of Mark know that Jesus is the one who was prophesied by John to be the one who would come to baptise with the Holy Spirit (1:8) and the one on whom God poured out the Holy Spirit at the baptism (1:9-11). The Scribes’ accusation that Jesus casts out demons by Beelzebub is therefore false and is itself blasphemy against God who has empowered Jesus with God’s Spirit. Yet what does all this mean for our understanding of the presentation of God in Mark?

First we may conclude that God is presented here as the eschatological judge. It is God who will forgive sins, and it is God who will hand out condemnation to those who have rejected God’s revelation in Jesus. Moreover, God is also implied to

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<sup>84</sup> M. M. Turner, “Holy Spirit,” in *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (ed. J. B. Green & S. McKnight; Leicester: Intervarsity Press, 1992), 341.

<sup>85</sup> Evald Lovestam, *Spiritus Blaspheme: Eine Studie zu Mk 3,28f // Mt 12,21f, LK 12,10* (Lund: Gleerup, 1968), 62. See also Walter Grundmann, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (THNT 2; Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1977), 112; Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 217; Turner, “Holy Spirit,” 346; Gundry, *Mark*, 177; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 53.

be the one from whom Jesus receives authority and identity. We understand from the story that it is Jesus against whom the Scribes speak. Yet Jesus defines their actions as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit and therefore a rejection of God. We can conclude, therefore, that Jesus does not take this accusation as a threat against himself, but as a direct challenge to the authority of God, thereby understanding himself within that authority. The audience, then, having been present at the baptism of Jesus when God's Spirit came upon him, and when God's approval was voiced to him, is persuaded to see not only in the words of Jesus, but also in the wider story of Mark, that God is once again presented as the source of Jesus' power and authority.

The audience further comprehends a characterisation of God in this pericope through Jesus' words concerning his true family. In vv. 31-35 Mark resumes the previous scene of 3:21-22, which pictured Jesus' family's peculiar response to Jesus. In this scene in vv. 31-35 Jesus is told of their presence, but he rejects them as his true family in favour of those with him, who he claims, do the will of God.

In an intriguing article on the literary structure and theological purpose of the so-called Markan sandwiches, J.R. Edwards argues that in most cases in Mark it is the middle story that provides the key for understanding the story that stands on either end. Identifying 3:20-35 as one of these passages that exhibit an A<sup>1</sup> B A<sup>2</sup> pattern, Edwards understands the actions of the mother and the brothers of Jesus as correlated to the blasphemous actions of the Scribes who accuse Jesus of having Beelzebub.<sup>86</sup> His family, like the Scribes, is intent on diverting him from his God ordained ministry. Thus, Jesus responds to the concern over his family by redefining who is actually in his family. The doers of God's will are ultimately the true family of Jesus, and not those who are related to him through blood. Yet what does this idea of doing the will of God express concerning the presentation of God in Mark's narrative?

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<sup>86</sup> James R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolation in Markan Narratives," *NovT* 31 (1989): 210.



In the immediate context, doing the will of God means not diverting Jesus, and possibly his followers, from carrying out the mission God has set for him. As we have shown, both Jesus' family and the Scribes are seen in direct opposition to God and the ministry of Jesus. Implied, therefore, in Jesus' saying concerning his true family is the accusation that those who *stand outside* in vv. 31-32 are not doers of God's will. An overall view of Mark's narrative suggests that part of God's will concerns the suffering of Jesus and the following of Jesus by the disciples. Yet, it would be shortsighted to limit the will of God to suffering. In the actions of Jesus to this point in the narrative, we may understand God's will as over powering evil, offering forgiveness for sins, and healing, actions that may serve as archetypes to be emulated by the hearers of Mark's Gospel.<sup>87</sup> Yet we can also put forward that the audience understands the will of God as correlated to the gospel of God which Jesus preached in Mark 1:14-15. If this is true, then the will of God is to believe that gospel and repent to God. Thus, although a clear definition of the will of God in Mark may not be deduced from this particular passage, we are on safe ground in arguing that doers of the will of God are not only in the family of Jesus, they are also in relation to God, a relationship further defined later in the narrative.

While the phrase "family of God" does not occur in the Markan narrative, it may be implied here, and, as we will see, in subsequent pericopes. The designations of God as πατήρ/ἁββᾶ is not made explicit here, but the audience already knows by this point in the narrative the special relationship that exists between Jesus and God, as verified by God in the baptism scene. Moreover, Jesus now defines those who do God's will in terms of intimate relationship with himself, and therefore logically implies that those who do God's will are in intimate relationship to God the Father of Jesus.<sup>88</sup> Thus, the audience is able to fill the gap and comprehend that

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<sup>87</sup> See Sharyn Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering: Mark 11:22-25 in the Context of Markan Theology* (SBLDS 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 133-150.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Hamerton-Kelly (*God the Father: Theology and Patriarchy in the Teaching of Jesus* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979], 65) makes an interesting observation when he points out that in the episode of the call of James and John to follow Jesus, the two men leave their father and follow Jesus (1:20). This is particularly interesting given the fact that they are called away from fishing, the



because Jesus is the Son of God, and those who do the will of God are the brothers, sisters, etc. of Jesus, these same followers are in special relationship to God.<sup>89</sup>

### Mark 4:1-34

Verses 1-34 of chapter 4 make up what scholars have called the parables chapter of Mark and are the first extensive parabolic teachings of Jesus found in Mark's Gospel. These verses have been the subject of many dissertations, monographs, and articles and therefore, due to limited space, our discussion is precluded from considering all the intricacies of the parables.<sup>90</sup> The attention of our probing will be to examine where God is presented in these parables, and indeed in the entirety of 4:1-34.

As this entire investigation is focused on the Markan narrative as a whole, so our reading of the parables chapter must consider these parables, along with interpretations, as vital to the hearers' understanding of the narrative. Moreover, we may suggest, following scholars such as Mary Ann Beavis, that the parables chapter was authored, not for the audience within the narrative of Mark, but the audience which Mark's narrative addresses. In other words, the intention of the parables chapter has more to do with the disciples in the Markan audience, than the disciples

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trade of their father, and according to Jewish family practice, the trade which these two sons would take up, to the work of fishing for men. The narrative seems to imply that the Son (Jesus) of the Father (God) is calling others into the family relationship in order to carry out the work designated by the Father, work already carried out by the Son in 1:14-15.

<sup>89</sup> On the theme of family in Mark see Detlev Dormeyer, "Die Familie Jesu und der Sohn der Maria im Markus evangelium," *Von Urchristentum zu Jesus: Festschrift für Joachim Gnilka*. Hrsg. von H. Frankemölle und K. Kertelge, eds. (Freiburg, 1989), 109-136; and Stephen Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* (SNTSMS 80; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>90</sup> For discussions of these parables see Adolf Jülicher, *Die Gleichnisreden Jesu*. 1-2 (Tübingen: Mohr, 1910); Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963); C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* rev. ed. (New York: Scribner's, 1961); John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper & Row, 1983); Dan O. Via, JR., *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); Joel Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God* (SBLDS 90; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1986); Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*.

within the narrative.<sup>91</sup> Therefore, our objective is to hear the teachings holistically, focusing on where God is directly defined or indirectly presented in these verses.

It will be helpful to look first at the broad scope of the parable of the sower and its interpretation. Jesus tells a story that would seem common to the listeners familiar with the agricultural practices of the day. A sower goes out to sow. Although explanation is not given as to who this sower might be, most have indicated, and certainly the narrative of Mark implies, that the sower is Jesus. How the seed is defined is left until the interpretation of the parable is given in 13-20. There, Jesus tells his disciples that the seed represents the word, probably implying the word of God. The soil is seen as the people among whom Jesus sows the word, some being receptive, and others not. Yet what in essence does this parable, and its interpretation communicate to the audience concerning God? To begin, it may be helpful for us to understand on what Mark places emphasis.

In a recent and novel investigation of the parable within the narrative of Mark's Gospel, Mary Ann Tolbert has proposed that the emphasis that is placed on "hearing" in the entire passage implies the importance of being good soil.<sup>92</sup> Moreover, since her focus is on how the parable itself forms the structure of Mark's Gospel, she concludes, "It is not the seed but the earth that is the focus of attention."<sup>93</sup> We may concede that this has been a dominant theme in the study of the parable, but in no way is this the emphasis of the parable. Donald Juel has pointed out that the soil is in fact a passive agent in the process and that no imperatives are given in the passage concerning the hearers being good soil.<sup>94</sup> In the same vein, Joel Marcus argues that it is impossible to take such a view because of the

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<sup>91</sup> See Mary Ann Beavis, *Mark's Audience: The Literary and Social Setting of Mark 4:11-12* (JSNTSup 33; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 136ff. The references to "hearing" that are sprinkled throughout 4:1-34 (3,9,12,15,16,18,20,23,24,33) may have as much to do with the hearing audience of Mark, as the hearing audience of Jesus.

<sup>92</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 150.

<sup>93</sup> Ibid., 149.

<sup>94</sup> Juel, *A Master of Surprise*, 60.

confusion as to whether humans are seed or soil.<sup>95</sup> It is not, in the interpretation Jesus gives, the soil that produces the fruit, although the type of soil may be implied as important. Therefore, we must reject Tolbert's view that the prominence is placed on the earth.

More important, however, to our understanding the parable and its interpretation may be the social context in which the parable, and Mark's Gospel, would have been heard. The audience would most likely have a general understanding that behind the agricultural process of sowing and reaping lays the activity of God.<sup>96</sup> Nils Dahl, concerning the idea of agricultural growth and the knowledge of those in the ancient world concerning nature, stated,

Thus we should bear in mind that the idea of organic growth was far from foreign to men of antiquity, and also that to Jews and Christians organic growth was but the other side of what was essentially the creative work of God who alone gives growth.<sup>97</sup>

The emphasis, then, is on the miraculous, divinely given yield that is brought forth despite the failures that are prior. The hearer of this parable, and the hearer of Mark's narrative, would understand that an abundant yield like that suggested by Jesus would not be possible except by the gift of God.<sup>98</sup>

Moreover, in the "spiritual" interpretation of the parable, certainly God is behind the abundance of fruit that is produced from the seed, i.e. the word of God, which is sown onto the good soil (cf. 4:27). The growth, which is produced in the believer, and the growth of God's reign within the world, then, is determined by God. God is the one who brings about an abundant harvest. God, therefore, is presented as the active agent, along with the sower, in the fruitful harvest produced

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<sup>95</sup> Marcus, *The Mystery of the Kingdom of God*, 61.

<sup>96</sup> John P. Heil, "Reader-Response and the Narrative Context of the Parables about Growing Seed in Mark 4:1-34," *CBQ* 54 (1992): 278 n18.

<sup>97</sup> Nils Dahl, "The Parables of Growth," *ST* 5 (1952): 143. See Dahl's article also for the many texts he catalogues on p. 142 n. 2.

<sup>98</sup> See Bruce J. Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 203.

from the seed in the good soil. But God is further implicated through other ways in this passage.

We have already come across several points in the narrative where the narrator or Jesus uses the divine passive in order to avoid using the divine name, and to indicate the activity of God. In 4:1-34 we find several uses of the divine passive that further present God as character in the narrative.<sup>99</sup> The first passive, δέδοται, occurs in 4:11, and designates that God is the one who has “given” the mystery of the kingdom of God to the disciples of Jesus. Γίνεται, also in verse 11, presents God as the one who gives “outsiders” the mystery in parables. The use of ἄφεθι in verse 12, the third use of the passive form of the verb ἀφίημι in Mark, presents God again as the one who can forgive<sup>100</sup>, except here Jesus voices this in the negative stating that those from whom the mystery is hidden will not turn back and be forgiven. Jesus’ saying concerning that which is hidden and that which is to be disclosed, employs the passive φανερωθῇ indicating again God’s divine activity in revelation.<sup>101</sup> In 4:24-25, Jesus again speaks to his disciples and uses the terms μετρεῖτε, προστεθήσεται, ἁρθήσεται to speak about the eschatological measure that will be given by God or taken by God.<sup>102</sup> The use of these divine passives, then, may be understood by the audience as indications that God is the one who reveals the mystery to those whom God chooses to reveal it. Moreover, those to whom this mystery is revealed are responsible to “hear” in order that God will give back to them the measure they give. Yet there are some who will not be given the mystery, but are only given parables. God will not forgive them, and from them God

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<sup>99</sup> Jeremias also lists these verbs as “divine passives”. See Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 11 n2.

<sup>100</sup> On the use of the passive here see Donald Juel, *The Gospel of Mark*. Interpreting Biblical Texts. (Nashville: Abington Press, 1999), 81.

<sup>101</sup> Gundry (*Mark*, 215) however does not see this as a divine passive, but as that which Jesus does in his explanations of the parables.

<sup>102</sup> Gundry (*Mark*, 218) again does not view these as divine passives. See, however, Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (trans. D. Kay; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 224; F. Blass & A. Debrunner, *A Greek Grammar of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. (trans. R. Funk; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961), 72.

will take. We can see, therefore, that regardless of the meaning of these sayings, God is indirectly presented as the active subject of these verbs.

Yet what is the mystery which is hidden from some but revealed to others? The saying of Jesus in verse 11 states that it is the kingdom of God which is the mystery. God's rule has invaded the world in the coming of Jesus, and though hidden from the eyes of those who cannot see, the hearers of Mark, who indeed "Listen!" are privy to the secret. They have heard that God has sent forth God's messenger to prepare the way of the Lord. They have seen the heavens ripped apart, and they have heard the divine voice. They have been given the secret concerning Jesus' authority to cast out demons, heal, and forgive. They are not the outsiders, but are rather the insiders, or potential insiders, who are called to do the will of God. In them, then, God is at work revealing the mystery and producing the miraculous yield. The audience of Mark, then, more fully understands the activity of God in Mark as more than the authenticator of Jesus, but also as the one who reveals the mystery of the kingdom to them.

#### **Mark 4:35-41**

The stilling of the storm scene is linked with the previous pericope by the phrase καὶ λέγει αὐτοῖς ἐν ἐκείνῃ τῇ ἡμέρᾳ ὀψίας γενομένης.<sup>103</sup> Yet, we may also propose that Jesus' power over the water confirms, at least in the mind of the audience, that the mystery of the kingdom of God resides in him. As he has announced the coming rule of God, so in his actions here he displays that power. Thus the emphasis Mark places on this scene is Christological. But is the passage limited to a Christological focus?

Jesus' concern over the faith of these disciples (4:40) may direct the audience to the theological concern of the passage. In whom are these disciples to have faith? The obvious answer is of course Jesus, but this is left unspecified and ambiguous. The Markan audience, however, may understand that faith in God is also required.

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<sup>103</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 263-264.

They have witnessed the power of Jesus to cast out evil spirits and they know that it is power from God. Indeed, by using the same verbs in Jesus' actions Mark may intend to link this stilling of the storm with the casting out of the demoniac that takes place in 1:21-28.<sup>104</sup> If so, the audience knows that the same "Holy one of God," who casts out the demoniac, is now pictured as the one from God who exercises power over the chaos of creation. Moreover, the audience also knows that Jesus acts on the authority of God by carrying out acts that only God can do, such as forgive sins and heal on the Sabbath. Jesus is thus pictured here as acting on the authority of God, even performing acts that only God can do. Yet behind this activity of Jesus is the activity of God.

This scene presents God as the God who has power over creation. This of course stems not only from the Old Testament picture of God as the Creator who has power over the creation (see Gen 8:1; Pss 74:13-14; 104:4-9; 107:25-30)<sup>105</sup>, but also from the prologue where the heavens are ripped at Jesus' baptism. In addition, the storm illustrates the phenomenological perspective of seeing creation as rebellious against God. Thus Jesus' God-given power illustrates the rule of God over the chaos of creation. The story calls the audience to have faith in the God who has power over creation. It pictures Jesus here as immovable in his faith and as an example to the disciples who panic in the face of the storm. Instead of taking Jesus' composure as a sign of faith in the God of creation, they interpret his sleeping as a sign of uncaring.<sup>106</sup> They have forgotten that Jesus has already stated that even though the sower sleeps, God continues to exert power (4:26-29). Although Jesus does not petition God, he fully understands the power of God at work in him. It is up to the

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<sup>104</sup> Jesus "rebukes" (ἐπετίμησεν; 1:25; 4:39) both the evil spirit and the wind, and commands both the spirit and the sea to be silent (φιμώθητι [1:25]; πεφίμωσο [4:39]). See Guelich, *Mark*, 267. On the Septuagint's use of ἐπιτιμᾶω as the background for understanding its use in Mark see Howard C. Kee, "The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories," *NTS* 14 (1967/68): 232-246.

<sup>105</sup> For discussions of the Old Testament motifs found in this scene see Ludger Schenke, *Die Wundererzählungen des Markusevangeliums* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1974), 59-69; Gerd Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), 99-103.

<sup>106</sup> Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (SNTSMS 64; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 216-217.

disciples and the Markan audience to recognise and believe in the power of God working through Jesus.

### Mark 5:1-20

Mark 5:1-20 presents for the audience of Mark's story a detailed account of Jesus' confrontation and exorcism of unclean spirits. Whereas earlier in Mark, these scenes have been narrated in somewhat minimal form, here the intricate details of the story bring to the audience a dramatic picture of God's power over evil, and they once again present God within the Gospel.

In this story Jesus once again confronts a person who is possessed by unclean spirits. Among the details of the story, Mark states that the man came from the tombs, repeated variously two more times, and that he was unable to be subdued, also repeated in the account. The audience clearly is to understand the seriousness of the scene, and the strength of the evil power that controls this man and confronts Jesus. As in the first encounter between Jesus and the unclean spirits in 1:23-26, the demon-possessed person approaches Jesus, and the evil spirits that indwell the man speak to Jesus. Again, the words that they utter are words that reinforce the identity of Jesus for the hearers of Mark's Gospel. "What have we to do with you, Son of the Most High God?" echoes what was earlier spoken by the demons in 1:24 and reflects the knowledge evil spirits have of Jesus' special relationship to God and his authority.<sup>107</sup> More importantly for our reading of the designation, God is once again presented as Father of Jesus. In other words, these evil spirits remind the Markan audience that God stands in special relationship to Jesus, and that Jesus receives his identity from God. This also reminds the hearers that Jesus' source of authority is God, in that in the baptismal scene where Jesus is called "my Son", Jesus is given divine authority. Thus the recognition of Jesus as Son of God recalls the source of Jesus' authority.

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<sup>107</sup> Howard C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 161.



This is further attested by the request that these spirits make of Jesus. Desiring not to be destroyed by the Son of the Most High, these spirits call out, “I adjure you by God, do not torment me” (5:7). This request, which I find that most commentators of Mark overlook, suggests to the audience that these spirits recognise the source of Jesus’ authority, and also communicates that Jesus places himself under that authority. Legion does not appeal to Jesus based on who Jesus is, although they recognise his power over them. They appeal directly by the name of the one who has sent Jesus, the one whose son they have correctly identified. As Guelich has pointed out, these spirits give up their own authority, and they appeal to the authority to which they and Jesus are subject.<sup>108</sup>

The authority and power of God in Jesus, however, is further presented in the dialogue that takes place between Jesus and the man who has been cleansed of the spirits. The man, most grateful for his newfound freedom, requests that he might follow Jesus. But Jesus requires something different from this new disciple, and he commands him to go and “tell them how much the Lord (κύριος) has done for you, and what mercy he has shown you.” To whom does κύριος refer, Jesus or God? Reflecting back on our previous discussion of its use in 1:2-3, we will remember that we concluded that the term as used in Mark’s narrative most likely refers to God. However, we also concluded that there seems to be in Mark an intersecting of Jesus and God by the use of this term. Here we may safely assume that the term κύριος is used in much the same way. As the demons recognised that it was God’s power and authority at work in Jesus, so Jesus himself recognised that God’s power and authority were at work in him to bring about the destruction of evil. Thus he may be using κύριος in reference to God. Yet, the man goes away and proclaims what Jesus has done for him, giving the impression that Jesus used κύριος in reference to

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<sup>108</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 279. Notice must also be given to the narrator’s stress on the great strength of the demon over the man (5:2-5). In narrating the story through these images, the implied author is able to build extreme contrast between the strength of the demon and the strength of Jesus. Thus the recognition of Jesus as the Son of the Most High by the demon, establishes for the audience the demon’s recognition of Jesus’ great power. Moreover, Legion’s appeal to God’s authority over Jesus suggests the clear understanding of the source of Jesus’ great power- God.

himself, or at least that the man understood him as referring to himself. By narrating the events in this way, Mark again seems to overlap the identity of Jesus with God.<sup>109</sup> He seems to have Jesus refer to God as the one who has freed this man, but then Mark tells the audience that the man goes and proclaims what Jesus has done.

Without question Jesus is the primary visible actor in this healing, but even he presents to the audience that God is the one who has acted. For the hearers, however, this is no surprise. From the time that God chose to enter into the narrative and empower Jesus, the audience of Mark's drama has been aware of the divine power and authority over the evil spirits. Moreover, the one who has been sent by God has proclaimed that God's rule has arrived. This arrival must unquestionably be linked to the destruction of evil by God's power.<sup>110</sup>

### Mark 7:1-23

Mark 7:1-23 presents Jesus once again in conflict with the religious leaders.<sup>111</sup> As with previous incidents involving Jesus and the authorities, the scene opens with the authorities observing the practices of Jesus' disciples (Cf. 2:18-20, 23-28), this time regarding their failure to wash their hands before partaking of food, something Mark tells the audience the Pharisees, and indeed all the Jews, did in observance of the tradition (παράδοσιν τῶν πρεσβυτέρων). Yet, Jesus' disciples have chosen not to do so and this prompts the Pharisees and the scribes to question Jesus regarding his followers' disregard for the tradition. Jesus' response once again turns the issue, not to the failure of his disciples to practice the tradition of the elders, but to the failure of the Pharisees to live according to God's law. In

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<sup>109</sup> Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader Response Commentary* (JSNTSup 164; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 201; Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983), 83.

<sup>110</sup> See Bruce Chilton, *Pure Kingdom: Jesus' Vision of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 70; J. D. G. Dunn, *The Christ and the Spirit*, Vol. 2, *Pneumatology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 182.

<sup>111</sup> The two most recent treatments of Mark 7:1-23 are Roger P. Booth, *Jesus and the Laws of Purity: Tradition History and Legal History in Mark 7* (JSNTSup 13; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986) and J. Svartik, *Mark and Mission: Mark 7:1-23 in its Narrative and Historical Contexts* (ConBNT 32; Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell International, 2000).

essence then, what we find in Mark 7:1-23 is a battle over who recognises and does what God requires. Each party seeks to argue for its own characterisation of God, and each party does so by characterising the opponents. The Pharisees seek to characterise Jesus and his disciples as transgressors of the tradition, while Jesus, as we will discuss, characterises the Pharisees as disobedient to God's command in Scripture. For the hearer of Mark's narrative, however, the issue of first importance centres on which of these parties is the reliable voice.

To highlight this battle, let us first consider what the authorities state. "Why do your disciples not walk according to the traditions of the elders, but eat with defiled hands?" (7:5). Their question, in a somewhat humorous sense, opens the door to Jesus' criticism. They expose their own unreliability by claiming that authority regarding cleanliness rests in human tradition and not in the authority of God. Their failure to speak even of God's law concerning purity opens them up to Jesus' condemnation by way of Isa 29:13. These authorities, then, are identified as those about whom Isaiah prophesied. They practice and teach human precepts as doctrines, yet they fail to honour God. In their zealousness for their own traditions they abandon, reject, and make void God's commandment and word. With his use of Isaiah 29, then, Jesus sets forth to expose the hypocrisy of the authorities. But such a citing is not enough to prove his case. He, therefore, sets forth an example to expose this hypocrisy further.

The issue Jesus chooses to attack regards the vow of *korban*.<sup>112</sup> According to Jesus, these authorities have disregarded the Law of Moses concerning the honouring of one's father and mother by their claim to have vowed all their possessions to God. This vow, then, precludes them from assisting a parent in old age. Yet the vow does not preclude their own use of these possessions.<sup>113</sup> Jesus interprets this as making void the word of God, since in their obligation to their tradition they thus fail to obey God regarding one's actions toward a father and mother. The debate, however, is not

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<sup>112</sup> For discussions regarding *Korban* see the commentaries and the brief, but helpful discussion by K. H. Rengstorf, "κορβαν," *TDNT* III: 860-866.

<sup>113</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 251.

primarily over the issue of *korban*, as Jesus states in v 13. The debate is over by whose authority does one live. Jesus characterises these authorities as viewing their own traditions as superior to God's law, and thus their authority as above that of God. As Jack Kingsbury has stated, "the religious authorities derive their authority from no source higher than themselves; Jesus' contention in effect, is that the authorities 'think the things not of God, but of humans.'"<sup>114</sup> But Jesus himself proclaims that it is God's authority that is superior.

Moreover, in his return to the issue regarding what is clean, Jesus sets out to dispel the notion that what enters the body is unclean. It is, instead, that which comes from within a person that makes one clean or unclean. The issue, then, is broader than simple obedience to laws and tradition. It also includes the attitude of the heart towards God.<sup>115</sup> In listing examples of things which are unclean, Jesus redefines for his listeners what it means to be under the authority of God instead of the authority of human tradition. Therefore, the pericope of 7:1-23 speaks more about the question over authority than what most have realised. Moreover, the scene once again characterises God for the audience.

God is presented here as the one who has supreme authority. It is quite interesting that, unlike in conflict scenes in the preceding narrative, Jesus makes no claims to having authority in this conflict scene (cf. 2:10, 28). Rather, he demonstrates that God's law is authoritative and that God's authority is absolute. He also shows that his disciples and indeed the crowd are not obligated to the authority of the Pharisees and scribes whose authority "is in reality the product of their own devising."<sup>116</sup> More accurately they are obligated to the authority that finds its source in God. Yet, though Jesus makes no direct claim to have authority in this passage, he is *shown* as teaching with authority, over against the leaders. Both he and the Pharisees and scribes voice teaching over what is clean and what is unclean, and over

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<sup>114</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/Fortress, 1989), 73.

<sup>115</sup> Stephen Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978), 91.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 74.

authority. But because Jesus is the reliable voice in Mark, the audience accepts his point of view, and his teaching on and by God's authority. Thus God is presented, over against human tradition, as the only tradition by which one is to live.<sup>117</sup>

### Mark 8:11-13

In this, yet another, conflict scene between Jesus and the Pharisees, the Pharisees request that Jesus produce a sign from heaven, most likely to indicate his authenticity as a prophet from God.<sup>118</sup> While some have suggested that these opponents are requesting an apocalyptic "sign from heaven", it is more likely that the phrase ἀπὸ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ functions as a periphrasis for God.<sup>119</sup> Thus these leaders are looking for God's direct authorisation of Jesus. But Jesus questions the motives of "this generation," reflecting for the audience the idea of the people's faithlessness in the testing of Moses in Deut 32.<sup>120</sup> Moreover, Jesus rejects their request stating that "no sign will be given," using the divine passive δοθήσεται.<sup>121</sup>

For Mark's audience, however, the Pharisee's request for a sign is out of the ordinary. They were privileged to hear the voice from heaven authenticating Jesus' identity.<sup>122</sup> Moreover, they have witnessed, like the Pharisees and the scribes that Jesus acts with power and authority.<sup>123</sup> He has taught and acted in congruence to his

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<sup>117</sup> This may not imply a total negation of traditions related to purity, but sets these in subordination to the more important issues of ethical purity, possibly tied to the swearing of oaths, as well as the keeping of the Decalogue.

<sup>118</sup> Lane sees Deut. 18:18-22 as the background to the Pharisees concern. See Lane, *Mark*, 275n 19.

<sup>119</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 414, Cranfield, *Mark*, 258.

<sup>120</sup> Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus*, 23.

<sup>121</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 414; Gundry, *Mark*, 402. We may contrast this use of δίδωμι with the way it is used in 4:11, again in the passive. Here Jesus states that a sign will not be given to these Pharisees, whereas in 4:11 he tells the disciples that they have been given the secrets of the kingdom of God.

<sup>122</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 261.

<sup>123</sup> Van Iersel (*Mark*, 260) rightly notes that the Pharisees may be asking for a different type of sign than the miracles Jesus has preformed. However, I disagree with his statement that the healings in Mark are not associated with heaven or God. As we have argued throughout, and will continue to maintain when the topic turns to Mark's Christology, the miracles in Mark are understood by the audience as that which Jesus does by the power of God. Moreover, these healings must be viewed as evidence of the coming rule of God. Finally, the explicit statement in 2:12 that the people glorified God is evidence against van Iersel's view.

announcement that God's rule is at hand. The Pharisees, however, have sought not to believe his teachings or his actions, and instead they demand that God personally give credit to Jesus via a sign. Yet their unbelief, and their very testing of God's authority, results in God withholding any sign from them, at least a sign they might believe.

Thus, for Mark's audience, God is once again presented as the source of Jesus' identity. In an ironic way, the Pharisees are correct to seek a sign from God concerning Jesus. God is the one who has authenticated Jesus' work. Yet their failure is in seeking a sign, and thus rejecting what they have already seen and heard, exhibiting their own faithlessness. Mark's audience, then, is lead to reflect on what they have heard in the narrative, namely the voice from heaven that legitimated who Jesus is. God then is presented once more as the source of Jesus' identity and authority, albeit indirectly.

### **Mark 8:27-9:1**

Mark 8:27 introduces one of the most significant passages in the entire Gospel regarding Christology and discipleship. It is the first up-front statement by Jesus, and indeed the narrator, concerning the fate of Jesus and the demands for those who would follow him. Yet it is quite unfortunate that of all that has been written on the pericope of 8:27-9:1, rarely has much been stated concerning the *theo*-logy of the narrative. Although Jesus and his fate are at the centre of what takes place in this passage, and indeed the demands of discipleship are forthright, as we will see, the crucial yet unseen character in the story is God. Moreover, God is the character who determines all that takes place in this pericope. Scholars are indeed correct to reflect on Jesus' words and the understanding of his fate and mission. Yet the over-arching force in the narrative is God.

The audience first encounters the presentation of God in the dialogue that takes place between Jesus and his disciples. Although implicit in the discussion, the answer that Peter gives to Jesus concerning who they think that he is brings to the



mind of the listening audience what they have heard throughout the story. This is conveyed in Peter's words, "You are the Messiah." While a detailed discussion of the Christological meaning of this title awaits our discussion of Mark's Christology, it is important that we understand that Mark's audience has encountered this title previously. In fact, the opening words of Mark's Gospel have communicated to the audience that Jesus is the Christ, the Messiah. For the audience, then, God is presented as the source of Jesus' identity and mission. God has anointed Jesus as his Messiah, and indeed the audience has been present for that anointing if we understand the baptism, and the Spirit's coming onto Jesus as that anointing. Therefore, God is presented once again in special relationship to Jesus.

In v 31, Jesus states plainly for the first time what is to be his fate. In these words of Jesus not only is Peter's concept of Messiah redefined, but the audience's understanding is as well. Jesus has not come to rule in the sense that Peter thinks; Jesus has come to suffer. For the audience, these words may be an abrupt shift in the narrative. Certainly, the Markan audience would have prior knowledge of the death of Jesus. But the listening audience would still find the words of Jesus somewhat shocking. What is shocking for them, and certainly for Peter, is the fact that Jesus understands his fate as divinely necessary. Markan scholars have long recognised that the use of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  (must) by Jesus indicates that he understood his suffering and death as determined by God. The audience then, understands that Jesus is not predicting that he will encounter suffering and death by his own choice, although he chooses to follow God's will, but by divine plan.<sup>124</sup> God, then, is presented as the one who has predetermined Jesus' mission and fate. As God is heard to be the one

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<sup>124</sup> Within the theological framework of Mark it is not possible to view Jesus' use of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  as a resignation to a force of impersonal fate. Throughout the narrative Jesus makes clear that his impending death is the will of God. This does not, however, minimise or negate his own wilful choice to die, as evidenced by his words in Mk 10:45, and his acceptance of God's will in the Garden of Gethseme. Little has been written on Mark's use of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  apart from what is discussed in the commentaries. But see W.J. Bennett, "The Son of Man Must...", *NovT* 17 (1978): 113-129; Charles H. Cosgrove, "The Divine  $\Delta\epsilon\iota$  in Luke-Acts," *NovT* 26 (1984): 168-190; Robert L. Mowery, "The Divine Hand and the Divine Plan in the Lukan Passion," *SBL Seminar Papers, 1991* (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1991) 558-575; Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and his Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan and Co., LTD., 1937), 90; Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 138, 166, 277-78, 280, 1485.



who has anointed Jesus, so too God is the one who has set forth the purpose for which Jesus came, that is to suffer, die, and rise.<sup>125</sup>

The idea of God as the authority in whom Jesus finds his mission and fate is advanced by the further dialogue between Jesus and Peter. Peter, upon hearing that Jesus understands his fate as leading to suffering and death, rebukes Jesus for such talk. Yet, Jesus in turn rebukes Peter and accuses him of thinking things which are human and not things which are of God (θεοῦ). Therefore, the two characters, Peter and Jesus, are at opposing ends of the divine will. The audience, knowing that Jesus is the reliable character in the narrative, is once again presented with the idea that God is the one who determines the fate of Jesus, not humans or even Jesus himself. Moreover, this authority extends to all who would want to follow Jesus. His words of 34-38 set the standard for what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. God's authority in Jesus' destiny, however, determines these demands. By calling the crowd with his disciples to hear these demands, Jesus sets forth the idea that God's will for him applies also to those who would want to become followers of Jesus. This is further evidenced by Jesus' words concerning how one saves one's life. By stating that one must lose one's life for the sake of Jesus and for the sake of the gospel, Jesus presents the idea that following him is correlated to believing in the gospel. The audience does not find these words new on the lips of Jesus. Jesus has been portrayed in 1:14 as the one who went out proclaiming the gospel of God. Therefore, the audience is to understand in the words of Jesus concerning losing one's life for the sake of the gospel, the idea that this is the gospel that has been given by God.<sup>126</sup>

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<sup>125</sup> It is quite interesting that both Matthew (16:21) and Luke (9:22) use the passive voice of the verb ἐγείρω (ἐγερεθῆναι; "will be raised"), while Mark (8:31) uses the active voice of ἀνίστημι (ἀναστῆναι; "rise"). Certainly both Matthew and Luke use the "divine passive" to indicate that God is the one who will raise Jesus from the dead. Mark's use of the active voice, however, does not require that the audience understood Jesus as going to raise himself. The use of δεῖ controls how the audience is to understand Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection. God is indeed the one who will raise Jesus from the dead. The divine passive, then, is not necessary to imply God as the agent of Jesus' subsequent rising.

<sup>126</sup> On Jesus' distinction between "my sake" and "the sake of the gospel," Gundry (*Mark*, 437) states, "the Gospel is on its way from being 'the Gospel of God' (1:15) to being 'the Gospel of Jesus Christ, Son of God' (1:1)."

The gospel is both from Jesus and about Jesus, and from God and about God. Therefore, when a follower chooses to lose his life for the sake of Jesus and the gospel, he chooses to go the way of Jesus, which is at the same time the way of God.

Jesus further speaks of God by designating him as the Father (πατήρ) in 8:38. Although this is not the first time the audience understands the relationship between Jesus and God, the characters in the story, outside the unclean spirits, have not up to this point been privy to this information. Moreover, this is the first time that Jesus calls God πατήρ. In doing so, he not only emphasises his relationship to God, but he also explicates for the hearers God's role in his own destiny. As Jesus has stated, God's will is that he must suffer. Yet in 8:38 he is clear to point out that this same God is the one who will vindicate him. While there may be others who are ashamed of Jesus, the Father will not be ashamed of the Son.<sup>127</sup> This glory of the Father is further clarified when Jesus proclaims that God will come as King. As Jesus preached the gospel of God and the coming rule of God in 1:14-15, so also here he speaks of the gospel (8:37) and the coming rule of God (9:1). Once again, therefore, the audience hears the voice of the reliable character Jesus present God as King.

### Summary

Through this analysis of Mark 1:1-9:1 we have been able to show that God is not only a major character within the narrative of Mark, Mark's purpose in writing his Gospel is overtly theological. From the beginning where God is viewed as active in the narrative, until 9:1 where Jesus speaks of the coming rule of God, the audience has been continually confronted with the active presence of God in the narrative. This will be further supported in the following chapter, where we will begin once again with the in-breaking of God, this time in the Transfiguration scene.

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<sup>127</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 437.

## Chapter Three

### The Presentation of God in Mark 9:2-16:8

#### Introduction

The transfiguration scene sets the stage for the second half of the Gospel.<sup>1</sup> As with the baptismal account in 1:9-11, the story presents God not only acting in the narrative, but also speaking. While God's actions are implied through the use of imagery and divine passives, God's voice is audible and explicit, showing to the audience once again the direct involvement of God in the story. Although in the second half of the Gospel the conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders progresses to the point of Jesus' execution, and the incomprehension of the disciples progresses to the point of Jesus' betrayal and desertion, the Markan audience is continually reminded of the presence of God in the narrative and in what takes place. The God who has invaded the narrative world of Mark continues to refuse to be forced from that world despite the evil of Jesus' enemies and the failings of his friends.

#### Mark 9:2-13

The audience is set up for the divine encounter of the transfiguration through hearing that after six days, Jesus and three of his disciples went up a "high mountain" (ὄρος ὑψηλόν; 9:2), a common place throughout biblical narratives where God and humans meet, as well as the place where heaven and earth meet.<sup>2</sup> This divine encounter begins, and God is indirectly presented, when Jesus is transfigured (μετεμορφώθη; 9:2), certainly a divine passive signifying that Jesus has been

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<sup>1</sup> M. Philip Scott sees the transfiguration story in Mark as the centre of Mark's gospel. He finds a chiasmic structure to Mark's narrative, and he argues 9:7, where the divine voice proclaims Jesus as the Beloved Son, is the "pivot of the chiasmus" ("Chiasmic Structure: A Key to the Interpretation of Mark's Gospel," *BTB* 15 [1985]: esp. 18).

<sup>2</sup> Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 294; Elizabeth S. Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991), 98. Standing in the background of this story is the story of Moses' going up a mountain after six days, and his being given a revelation from God (Exod 24:15).

clothed in God's radiance and glory.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, the appearance of the two figures from the Hebrew Bible, Elijah and Moses, occurs through the actions of God. These two have not come on their own accord, but have "appeared" (ὤφθη; 9:4) before Jesus and the three disciples. Here, once again the divine passive is used implying God's action in their appearance.<sup>4</sup> The imagery of the cloud, much like the mountain, indicates to the audience that a theophany on the level of Old Testament theophanies is about to occur and raises the expectations of the audience for what will happen next.

What transpires next is, however, not only crucial for the audience, but also for the characters who are with Jesus on the mountain. They have been witnesses to the radiance and glory of God given to Jesus, the appearance of two heroes from the past, and the overshadowing of the cloud. The voice they are about to hear, however, has only previously been heard by Jesus, and the audience. Therefore, not only does the audience now clearly hear the voice of God in the narrative for a second time, so also other characters in Mark's story experience the presence of God entering the world. As God was presented as entering the narrative world in the baptismal account, so God is presented as entering the narrative world here. For the characters who witness this presence and hear this voice, Jesus' question to them in 8:29 concerning his identity is answered forcefully by God. For the audience, what has been told to them throughout the narrative, and indeed told to them by the very voice of God, is once again communicated to them, that Jesus is God's Son. By having God proclaim this, the narrator not only affirms what has been stated about Jesus all

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<sup>3</sup> Morna Hooker, "What Doest Thou Here Elijah?: A Look at St. Mark's Account of the Transfiguration," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*. (eds. L. D. Hurst and N. T. Wright; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 61; van Iersel, *Mark*, 294. Howard C. Kee suggests that the radiance seen by the disciples and portrayed by Mark is "borrowed glory" where in Jesus is reflecting the glory of God much like Moses after standing in the presence of God. See Howard C. Kee, "The Transfiguration in Mark: Epiphany or Apocalyptic Vision?" in *Understanding the Sacred Text: Essays in honor of Morton Enslin*. (eds. F. W. Beare, S. H. Blank, J. L. McKenzie; Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1972), 144.

<sup>4</sup> The use of ὤφθη in the LXX is often for the purpose of describing the appearance of God. See for example Gen 12:7; 17:1; 26:2,24; 35:9; Exod 3:2; 6:3. See W. Michaelis, "ὄραω," *TDNT* 5:331-334.

along, but also presents God as the authoritative voice in the narrative, as well as the source of Jesus' identity, authority, and mission.

God as the source of Jesus' mission is once again put before the audience when Jesus is heard in 9:12 to speak about the Son of Man suffering "as it is written." While much debate centres around the Old Testament text to which Jesus may be referring, we can conclude with some scholars that Jesus may not have in mind a specific text from the Hebrew Bible, but may be alluding to a number of texts, specifically Isa 52:13-53:12, and Ps 22, 69.<sup>5</sup> Regardless of what texts may be in the view of Jesus, however, the intent is to place emphasis once again on the divine necessity of Jesus' approaching death. This divine necessity is not limited to *Jesus'* sufferings, however. For just as Jesus states that the Son of Man will suffer as it is written, so he states that Elijah has suffered "as it is written about him" (καθὼς γέγραπται ἐπ' αὐτόν). Although problems persist as to where this is written about Elijah<sup>6</sup>, the reference to the suffering of Elijah is to be understood as implying John's suffering. Having already associated John with Elijah from what is conveyed to them about his appearance in chapter 1, the hearers of Mark's story comprehend that John's death, like the coming death of Jesus is divinely ordained.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the audience not only perceives that God's will stands behind the future sufferings of Jesus, but is also implied as mandating the sufferings of John.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 300.

<sup>6</sup> Many commentators think that 2 Kgs 19:2-10 lies behind this reference. See van Iersel, *Mark*, 300; Hugh Anderson, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Oliphants, 1976), 228; and Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 395, who also states that the traditions behind Rev 11:3-13 are in the mind of the author of Mark.

<sup>7</sup> See the brief comments in Anderson, *Mark*, 228.

<sup>8</sup> Following Perrin and Duling, Marcus states that there are crucial parallels not only between what happens to John and Jesus, but also what will happen to Christian disciples. See Joel Marcus, "Mark 9,11-13: 'As it has been Written,'" *ZNW* 80 (1989): 55n50.

### Mark 9:14-29

After Jesus and the three disciples descend the mountain to join the others, the crowd who had been arguing among themselves immediately confront Jesus. Jesus questions them concerning their arguing, and in response a man from the crowd begins to tell Jesus about how he had brought his son to be cleansed of an evil spirit but Jesus' disciples were not able to perform the miracle. The man seems even to doubt whether Jesus will be able to heal his son. In response to the man's doubt, Jesus states, "All things are possible for the one who believes (τῷ πιστεύοντι; 9:23)."

A question that is seldom addressed about this exchange between Jesus and the boy's father is this: In what or whom is Jesus calling the man to believe? While it is assumed by most that Jesus is indicating that faith in his power to cleanse the boy is required, and that the audience at this point is indeed to have this in view, when the audience comes to Jesus' statement in 9:29 concerning prayer, there seems to be a modification of the object of faith.<sup>9</sup> This is not to say that Jesus is not calling the man to have faith in his power, but that Mark may be reminding his audience concerning the source of Jesus' power, and undeniably the source of their power if they are to carry out these miracles. While admittedly Jesus does not pray before he heals the boy, the audience is to understand that Jesus' power comes from God. Jesus' power has been attributed to God previously in the Gospel, so here the audience is to understand that God is the source of that power. Moreover his word to the disciples, "This kind can come out only through prayer" (9:29), implies that their power to perform these miracles can only come from God.<sup>10</sup> As Jesus has been given this power, so the disciples, through their prayer to God, can be given this power. Thus while they are portrayed as failures in their initial attempt to cast out

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<sup>9</sup> On the reading of καὶ νηστεία as a gloss see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 101.

<sup>10</sup> The use of πιστεύω and προσεύχῃ within the same context will occur once again in Jesus words to the disciples concerning prayer and belief in 11:22-24. In that address Jesus states that God is to be the subject of the believer's faith. Here it seems to be implied, or corresponding to having faith in Jesus.

the spirit from the boy, Jesus' words imply that with God's power given to them through prayer and faith, these followers of Jesus can perform miracles similar to those done by Jesus. Therefore, God is presented as the one in whom the disciples are to be dependent for power to carry out this kind of miracle.<sup>11</sup>

### Mark 9:30-50

Directly following the event where Jesus heals the boy whom the disciples could not, Jesus confronts his followers once again with what will happen to him. Although this passion prediction echoes somewhat the one voiced by Jesus in 8:31-33, there are a few significant differences. One of these variations is the inclusion of *παράδιδοται* to indicate what will happen to Jesus. The crucial question for our purposes concerns the subject of this passive verb. In the following discussion, then, we will argue not for a strictly divine passive force of the verb, but rather a view that sees on one level the involvement of human agents in the handing over of the Son of Man and on another level God's activity in this fate.

Gundry has argued forcefully that *παράδιδοται* should not be taken as a divine passive in this context.<sup>12</sup> Yet in his discussion of this verse he leaves no room for the possibility of God being active in the handing over of Jesus. Hooker, however, notes that the use of *παράδιδοται* in 9:31 should be translated as "handed over," and not as "betrayed."<sup>13</sup> Moreover, she points out that Judas is not mentioned in this context, and therefore, the implication is that "God himself will deliver the Son of Man into the hands of men."<sup>14</sup> Added to this, we can suggest, along with D. Moo, that the use of this word, though possibly implying Judas in his act of betrayal, is not limited to this human act. As Moo states, "... behind Judas'

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<sup>11</sup> Morna D. Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: A&C Black, 1991), 225.

<sup>12</sup> Robert Gundry, *Mark: A Commentary on His Apology for the Cross* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999), 493. Joachim Jeremias (*New Testament Theology* [London: SCM Press LTD, 1971], 11), however, does view the passive use of this verb in Mark 9.31 as the divine passive.

<sup>13</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 226. See also Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1480 n24.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*



action stands the initiative of God the Father, who delivers His Son into the hands of men.”<sup>15</sup> From the audience’s perspective, Jesus’ prediction here echoes what he has already stated concerning his destiny in 8:31-33, as he clearly defines his forthcoming suffering as predetermined by God.

After Jesus is pictured giving this passion prediction to his disciples, he turns to them to inquire about their arguing on the way. Although the disciples would not confess the subject of their argument to Jesus, the narrator does tell his audience that they were arguing over who is the greatest (9:34). Jesus’ concern is to teach these disciples that in order to be first, one must choose to be last. In his call to them to be servants he directs their attention to a child whom he takes to himself. In doing so, he states,

*Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent (τὸν ἀποστέλλαντά) me (9:37).*

The audience, through Jesus’ words τὸν ἀποστέλλαντά με finds once again that God is presented in close relationship with Jesus. Since Jesus is the one sent from God, indeed the Son of God, the audience understands that the welcoming of one such child means not only the welcoming of Jesus himself, but the welcoming of God as well, since the one who is sent is the representative of the one who sends.<sup>16</sup> In fact, Gundry has suggested that the use of “οὐκ...ἀλλὰ...” should cause the verse to be translated “not...so much as...” and indicates “an ultimate climax in the receiving of God by the receiving of Jesus.”<sup>17</sup> Thus, the listeners of Mark’s narrative are confronted with the reality that in their welcoming of “one such child” they are in reality welcoming Jesus, and moreover, God.

Yet there is something more being implied by Jesus’ statement. First, the close special relationship of Jesus to God is again brought to the fore. What the audience has known since the prologue is further clarified by Jesus here, namely that

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<sup>15</sup> Douglas Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1983), 92.

<sup>16</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 308.

<sup>17</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 509.

God is the sender of Jesus. Second, since God is the sender, and Jesus is the one sent, the encounter with God by the hearers of Mark's narrative is possible through their encounter with Jesus. In other words, the Father is met in the Son. Given, then, these two implications of Jesus' statement, we may logically propose a third. If Jesus is in special relationship to God, and in the receiving of Jesus humans also receive God, then those receiving both Jesus and God stand in special relationship to God, a relationship defined in terms of Father to child. This, of course, has already been implied by Jesus' statement concerning those who are members of his true family (3:34-35), and it will be further clarified when Jesus, speaking to the disciples in 11:25, calls God "your Father in heaven." But here, in the choosing of a "child" Jesus may be setting before his hearers the implication of their status as children of the Father of Jesus.<sup>18</sup> Indeed, if Jesus is the Son of God, then the followers of Jesus, who receive him, welcome also God, a point that will be further illustrated in the parable of the wicked tenants. Like Jesus, who does the will of God, those who follow him are in special relationship to God. Thus Jesus implies that those who do not do the will of God, and in this instance it means receiving "the child," are shut off from God.

As the audience has heard Jesus state that those who are truly in his family are those who do the will of God (3:35), so in this pericope he teaches his listeners what is required if they desire to enter the kingdom of God. The demands for purity placed on his listeners defines for them that the kingly rule of God requires submission to the divine will. Moreover, Jesus uses statements that define entering into life and the kingdom of God physically incomplete, as better than going into *γενναν* having a complete body. By using the phrase *εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν* in vv. 43 and 45, and the phrase *εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν βασιλείαν τοῦ θεοῦ* in v. 47, Jesus is implying that the two are synonymous.<sup>19</sup> In other words, when one enters the kingly rule of God, one has also entered life. Moreover, since both phrases

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<sup>18</sup> Is it possible that the use of *παῖς* implies both "child" in the strictest sense, as well as "servant" in the sense of the disciples as servants of God. Of course Mark never calls followers of Jesus "servants of God", but Jesus' teaching on service in this context may imply this.

<sup>19</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 411.

are used in contrast to ἀπελθεῖν/ βληθῆναι εἰς τὴν γεένναν, we may infer that Jesus wishes to use the latter phrases as implying death, i.e. eternal death. Thus Jesus sets forth demands for discipleship that are based on the authority of God as King. The entering of the kingdom of God is only possible when one lives in submission to the will of God.<sup>20</sup> The entering into γεένναν, however, is brought about when one lives outside the will of God. Once again, then, God is presented as ruler of the kingdom of God, who has set forth, through the authoritative teachings of Jesus, the way one must take in order to enter into the kingdom and encounter God.

### Mark 10:1-12

The setting of Mark 10:1-12 shows Jesus again embroiled in conflict with the Pharisees. The audience is given a perspective on this ensuing conflict by the narrator's statement that the Pharisees were questioning Jesus in order to test (πειράζοντες) him. In giving this introductory statement about the motive of the Pharisees, the audience is warned by the narrator once again to listen cautiously to the point of view of the Pharisees, and to take seriously the point of view of Jesus. In other words, Jesus is the authoritative voice of vv. 2-9 who speaks of and for God. In seeking to test Jesus, the Pharisees ask him if it is lawful for a man to divorce his wife. Again, their motives are exposed in that the force of their question has to do with what is permissible.<sup>21</sup> Jesus, however, turns the discussion from what is allowed by the law, to what God demands. In doing so he appeals not to the law, but to God's authority as Creator.

There are both allusions to the Creation narrative and quotes from Genesis in the answer that Jesus gives to the Pharisees. In discussing these, we will see how God is spoken of in this conflict scene. First, Jesus states, "But from the beginning

<sup>20</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 412, notes that the use of εἰσελθεῖν εἰς τὴν ζωὴν in v43 and v45 "implies that the emphasis is upon the kind of life which belongs to this domain, that is, the rule of God in human experience."

<sup>21</sup> Anderson, *Mark*, 241; Hooker, *Mark*, 235; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (trans. D. H. Madvig. London: SPCK, 1971), 203. On the non-juridical use of ἔξεστιν in 10:2 see Jeffrey B. Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* (JSNTSup 112; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 279-280.

of creation (ἀρχῆς κτίσεως)”, certainly echoing the words of Genesis 1:1.<sup>22</sup> Second, vv. 6-7 contain a partial quote from Genesis 1:27b and 2:24 respectively.<sup>23</sup> While it is true that the name God (θεός) is not used in either of these two statements of Jesus, the use of the quote in v6 from Gen 1:27 implies that God is the one who has “made them male and female” simply because the LXX reading of 1:27 has the name θεός in the first half of the verse. An informed audience of the Markan narrative is assumed to be aware that the reference Jesus quotes implies God as the subject.<sup>24</sup> This leaves no question then as to the authority to which Jesus is appealing in answer to the testing question of the Pharisees. Moreover, Jesus’ general statement in v10 which closes his discussion with the Pharisees, states straightforwardly that God is the authority of the marital relationship and stands as a warning against any who would seek to separate the two who had become one flesh by God’s design.<sup>25</sup>

In this confrontation scene the issue that is raised by the opponents of Jesus concerns what is permissible regarding divorce. Jesus, the authoritative voice in the narrative, does not appeal to what is permissible, but he rather points out the reason for this permission, because of their “hardness of heart,” and also to what is

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<sup>22</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 317.

<sup>23</sup> Gen 1:27b (LXX) reads ἄρσεν καὶ θῆλυ ἐποίησεν αὐτούς. Gen 2:24 (LXX) reads ἔκεκεν τούτου καταλείψει ἄνθρωπος τὸν πατέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ τὴν μητέρα αὐτοῦ καὶ προσκολληθήσεται πρὸς τὴν γυναῖκα αὐτοῦ καὶ ἔσονται οἱ δύο εἰς σάρκα μίαν.

<sup>24</sup> Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 88) states that the inclusion of ὁ θεός in some mss may have been placed there in order to guard against an uninformed reader understanding Moses as the subject of ἐποίησεν. An informed reader of Mark, i.e. one who would be familiar with the Genesis narrative, would therefore understand that God is the subject of the verb.

<sup>25</sup> William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark*. NICNT. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 356; Westerholm, *Jesus and Scribal Authority* (Lund: CWK Gleerup, 1978), 122; Dan O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel- In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 103. Gibson (*The Temptations of Jesus*, 283-285) argues that Jesus is not appealing to the Genesis narrative as proof of his position, but is instead asserting his “divinely imputed ἐξουσία” (284), and his commitment to the divine will. While I concede that I have argued throughout that Jesus is presented as the one endowed with the authority of God, I think here it is more that Jesus’ authority is seen in his exposition of Scripture. So against Gibson, I would argue that the use of the Genesis narrative is for the specific purpose of establishing the divine authority over the marital relationship over against the authority of Moses. The issue of Jesus’ authoritative exposition of Scripture will be taken-up more fully in the discussion of Mark’s Christology.

demanded by God as the Creator of the marriage relationship. In shaping the story in this way, the narrator again sets Jesus and the religious leaders at odds over authority. Resembling somewhat the conflict over *korban* in chapter 7, this conflict scene shows the religious leaders claiming authority from Moses. Jesus, however, again teaches submission to the authority of God, this time basing his argument upon the Jewish belief in God as the Creator of the marital relationship. In doing so, he also implies through the warning of v. 9 that those who would destroy the marital relationship that God has established set themselves against God. Moreover, he tells his disciples when they are all in the house that divorce leads to adultery, which itself is a direct violation to the commandments given by God through Moses. While Jesus does not pit Moses' authority against God's authority, he does highlight the opposition between God and humans.<sup>26</sup>

We might add at this point that the Pharisees implicitly characterise God. First, they neglect what God laid down at creation regarding the marriage relationship. And second, in appealing to Moses' actions in Deut 24:1-4, they are placing Moses in authority over God's authority as Creator.<sup>27</sup> In shaping the narrative in this way, Mark intends to set Jesus' point of view over against that of the Pharisees, again portraying Jesus as the reliable character in the narrative, and as the one who speaks authoritatively of and for God. Thus, unlike Jesus, the Pharisees do not recognise the authority of God, particularly as it is portrayed in Jesus' actions and teachings.

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<sup>26</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 318.

<sup>27</sup> P. Farla remarks, "In his counter question Jesus asks the Pharisees for a text from the Torah and it is subsequently cited by the Pharisees (Deut 24.1-4). Jesus dismisses this text as being inadequate and irrelevant, and refers to the beginning of Creation." (See "The Two Shall Become One Flesh: Gen 1.27 and 2.24 in the New Testament Marriage Texts," in *Intertextuality in Biblical Writings: Essays in honour of Bas van Iersel* [ed. S. Draisma; Kampen: Uitgeveramaatchappij J.H. Kok, 1989], 69). Of course, my argument begs the question, "Would not Jesus' audience see Deut 24 as from God, as Gen 2?" On the one hand, yes. But on the other, the text of Mark is showing that the Pharisees use the text from Deut to argue for what is *permissible*, whereas Jesus uses the Gen text to show what God *requires* from the beginning of Creation. On Jesus' use of these two verses from Genesis to address an issue in which the original meaning of the text does not address see, J. A. Fitzmyer, *Essays of the Semitic Background of the New Testament*, 37-38, who finds the same use of Gen 1:27 in CD 4:19-5:2, a prohibition against polygamy.

### Mark 10:13-16

The pericope involving Jesus and the children follows nicely what has been stated concerning the marital relationship. Here, the children are being brought to Jesus in order that he might touch them. Yet the disciples seek to prevent this from occurring. Jesus, however, rebukes the disciples, who may have forgotten what Jesus had said in 9:36-37 regarding the welcoming of children. Calling on them to allow these children to come to him, Jesus seizes the opportunity to teach concerning the kingdom of God.

The importance of the two references to the kingdom of God for our understanding of how God is presented in Mark's Gospel is two-fold. First, through the words which Jesus uses to speak of the kingdom of God in this teaching, the hearers are presented with the idea that the kingdom of God is something which is given. Although the meaning of the kingdom of God is unclear at this point in the narrative, it is certain that the kingdom is that which can be given and entered into. Jesus teaches his audience that one is to receive the kingdom as a child receives a gift.<sup>28</sup> Thus God is presented as the giver of the kingdom. The significance of this lies in the presentation of God as Father of both Jesus and the followers of Jesus. We have already argued that this relationship is implied in Jesus' teaching in 9:37. Here, however, the implication is that the kingdom is given to children. While there are various reasons given to explain this statement by Jesus, it seems that the use of children here again implies the presentation of God as Father. This argument is based on the Old Testament idea of God as the giver of inheritance to the children of Israel.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> It is not fully clear as to how the audience is to understand the phrase ὡς παιδίον. W. K. L. Clarke, (*New Testament Problems* [London: SPCK, 1929], 37-38) suggests that this phrase should be read with kingdom, therefore presenting the idea that one is to receive the kingdom as one receives a child. Yet, most commentators have argued that the phrase is to be taken as directed to the one who receives the kingdom, thereby indicating that one must receive the kingdom as a child would receive a gift. I tend to favour this latter understanding. For arguments for this view see E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium Des Markus*. MeyK 2. (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 204f.; Lane, Mark, 361; Taylor, Mark, 423; Ernest Best, *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 80-97.

<sup>29</sup> On this see Marianne M. Thompson, *The Promise of the Father: Jesus and God in the New Testament* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2000), 44. In her study of God as Father in the



The second point of importance concerning the characterisation of God follows directly the first. God is certainly presented as the one who gives the kingdom, but more specifically as the one who gives the kingdom to those who receive it as a child does. In other words, if we take Jesus' saying as most do, not as a literal statement concerning children, but rather as how one is to receive the kingdom, we may understand that God desires to give the kingdom to those who become childlike, i.e. those dependent on the giver in their attainment of such gifts.<sup>30</sup> The hearers of Mark's Gospel, then, are to comprehend that one must take a position of dependence on the giving of God in receiving the kingdom of God. Human authority, power, or status will not buy the kingdom, or places in the kingdom, as will soon be made clear in 10:35-45. Thus, not only is God characterised here as the giver of the kingdom, but more specifically God is presented as the Father who gives the kingdom to his children who express their dependence on God as the giver. This of course reflects Jesus' initial preaching in 1:14-15 when he proclaimed that the kingdom of God is near, and when he called on all to repent and believe in the gospel of God. Moreover, throughout Mark's narrative there seems to be a tension between the kingdom of God as that which is given by God and that which is received by humans through some effort, deed, or attitude. Both the giving of the kingdom by God and the requirements for receiving the kingdom, then, are held in tension.

Further, this teaching of Jesus, and his subsequent blessing of the children implies that Jesus acts as agent for God's rule on earth. He teaches that one must receive the kingdom as a child, then he takes the children who have been brought to him in order that he may touch (ἅψῃται) and bless (κατευλόγει) them. Not only does he act on his own instructions given in 9:37, he also extends to them the

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New Testament, Thompson begins by demonstrating that in the Old Testament God is also presented as Father. She argues that three aspects of this presentation are central: "(1) Above all, the father is the source or origin of a clan, who as the founding father provides an inheritance to his children. (2) A Father protects and provides for his children. (3) Obedience and honor are due to the father, and, hence, when children disobey or go astray, they are corrected or disciplined." (39).

<sup>30</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 360; Schweizer, *Mark*, 207; Anderson, *Mark*, 246; Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 96; Judith Gundry-Volf, "To Such as These Belongs the Reign of God," *Theology Today* 56 (2000): 474.



blessing of the kingdom.<sup>31</sup> The authority of God as King on the earth resides in God's agent and Son Jesus. Thus God is presented in 10:13-16 as the giver of the kingdom of God, and as the one who has given authority over the kingdom to Jesus.

### Mark 10: 17-31

While Mark 10:17-31 pictures a setting different from 10:13-16, Jesus' teaching concerning ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ links the two passages. Moreover, we might add, along with William Lane, that the pericope of 10:17-31 follows nicely Jesus' teaching that the kingdom of God is a gift given by God, and precedes the third passion prediction "which sharpens the demand to follow Jesus on the way to the cross."<sup>32</sup> What we expect to find, therefore, is that as in 10:13-16, God is presented here as the King, who sets the requirements by which one enters into the kingdom of God. What we will discover, however, is that through Jesus' dialogue with the young man, and his teaching to his disciples, God is presented as the gracious and powerful King.

The passage opens with a young man approaching Jesus, seeking to find the correct teaching on how he might inherit eternal life. In his inquiry he addresses Jesus as διδάσκαλε ἀγαθέ (good teacher). By addressing Jesus in this manner, the man is pictured, unlike the religious leaders in Mark, as understanding Jesus to be an authority regarding the issue on which he seeks clarification. Jesus' response to the man is quite startling for the audience who has accepted that Jesus is the "good teacher." Numerous attempts have been taken by scholars to explain why Jesus responds to the man in this manner, too numerous to discuss in this investigation.<sup>33</sup> It is, however, clear from the narrative that Jesus is not necessarily divesting himself of being good, but he rather is pointing the attention of the young man from himself

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<sup>31</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 545 questions, "Does the prefix κατ- imply that blessing, the gift of salvation, flows through his hands "down" on the children? Whether or not, the complex form of the verb stresses Jesus' authority to elevate even children to the heirship of God's kingdom."

<sup>32</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 363.

<sup>33</sup> See Taylor, *Mark*, 426-427 for a brief sketch of some of the options.

to God, the one who is the giver of life.<sup>34</sup> The crucial question we must ask, however, concerns what the audience is to understand from Jesus' words οὐδεὶς ἀγαθὸς εἰ μὴ εἷς ὁ θεός.

I propose that since Mark has frequently quoted or alluded to the Old Testament as the extra text from which the audience is to gain reading comprehension, the understanding of God as good must be understood through the Old Testament teaching concerning God's goodness. While a comprehensive study on God as described as good in the Hebrew Bible is too broad for our purposes, we might make some general remarks concerning God being called good in the Old Testament.<sup>35</sup> First, there are references to God as good that are directly linked to God demonstrating love and mercy toward Israel.<sup>36</sup> Second, there are references that speak of the good that God has done for Israel.<sup>37</sup> Third, at different points in Deuteronomy, the land is described as ἀγαθὸς and is designated as the land that the Lord has given to Israel.<sup>38</sup> Therefore, without making the mistake of drawing out unsubstantiated and overly broad conclusions about what the Old Testament states concerning God as good, we may suggest that the goodness of God is directly linked to what God does for or gives to Israel.<sup>39</sup>

Returning then to Mark 10:17-31, I propose that this understanding of God is what Mark suggests, through the words of Jesus. I find it peculiar that many commentators separate Jesus' statement concerning God as good from the question posed by the man, as if Jesus' words about God's goodness do not relate in any way

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<sup>34</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 365; Taylor, *Mark*, 426.

<sup>35</sup> We may say that one of the essential qualities stressed about God in Judaism and the Hebrew Bible is God's goodness especially in relation to God's mercy and compassion shown to Israel. See Claus Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say about God?* F. W. Golka, ed. (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979).

<sup>36</sup> 1 Chr 16:34; 2 Chr 5:13; LXX Pss 117:1-4; 135:1.

<sup>37</sup> Exod 18:9; Num 10:29.

<sup>38</sup> Deut 1:25; 6:18; 11:17; 26:11.

<sup>39</sup> For a good discussion of the use of ἀγαθὸς in relation to God in the Old Testament see W. Grundmann, "ἀγαθὸς," *TDNT* 1:10-18. Cf. Westermann, *What Does the Old Testament Say about God?*, 43-52.

to what the man asks. It seems to me that in his words, "Why do you call me good? No one is good but God alone" (10:18), Jesus is not only directing attention from himself to God, but is primarily pointing to the goodness of God as the giver of eternal life, and indeed the law Jesus states.<sup>40</sup> In other words, the man, as well as Mark's audience, is to understand that statement about God as the only one who is good as presenting God as the one who is the giver of the eternal life the man seeks to inherit. Although Jesus has stated previously that he has authority on earth, authority the audience knows is given by God, at this point he makes no such a claim regarding the giving of eternal life. He refers, however, to the biblical idea that the good God is the giver of good things. In the narrative of Mark these are life and the kingdom of God which have been used synonymously before, and are linked here by the man's request to have eternal life and the demands to which Jesus points the man. Moreover, the Markan audience has only recently (10:13-16) heard Jesus speaking of God as the one who gives the kingdom. Thus, the portrayal of God as giver is once again present here in the dialogue between the man and Jesus.

Upon hearing the man claim that he has kept the law, the standard to which Jesus points the man in response to his question, Jesus calls the man to sell all his possessions, give to the poor, and follow him. These requirements the man finds difficult, and so he goes away grieving. Mark is clear to tell his audience that the man was grieving because he had many possessions and must have thought that to give them up was not possible. Undeniably, Mark presents the man's reaction in order to lead into what Jesus tells his disciples concerning wealth and the kingdom of God. His statements are shocking to the disciples, as he seems to tell them that wealth is an overwhelming barrier precluding the rich from salvation.<sup>41</sup> In hearing Jesus say how hard it is for one who is wealthy to enter into the kingdom of God, they ask "τίς δύναται σωθῆναι?" Jesus responds to their anxiety with the reassurance that not all is lost. Although it is impossible for humans to gain salvation on their own, for God all things are possible (πάντα γὰρ δυνατὰ παρὰ

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<sup>40</sup> In a much too brief a comment, Anderson (*Mark*, 248) seems to make this point.

<sup>41</sup> David Garland, *Mark* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 398.

τῷ θεῷ).<sup>42</sup> In other words, human striving will not bring salvation; only God's power is able to save. In this sense, Jesus is characterising God as the powerful ruler of the kingdom of God. And much like what was stated in 10:13-16 concerning God as the one who gives the kingdom, God is presented here as the one who gives by his power eternal life, salvation, and ability to enter into the kingdom of God, even to those who seem, from the perspective of humans, beyond salvation.<sup>43</sup>

Still, what is the audience to make of Jesus' demands for his followers if they understand that eternal life, salvation, and entrance into the kingdom are all given only by God's goodness and power? Is there tension between what God alone can do, and what is required from disciples? And if so, what is the audience to understand about God? While God has been portrayed as the giver of the kingdom, Jesus' words in 10:13-16 are fresh on the ears of the audience. There he stated that in order to receive the kingdom, one must do so as a child. In other words, one must rely not on anything or anyone, but God alone. As the child is able to receive only what is given to her, so the one who seeks eternal life, salvation, and entrance into the kingdom, must become one who is dependent on the giver. Moreover, Jesus placed other such demands on his listeners in 9:42-48. Jesus therefore calls the man with many possessions to rid himself of what prevents him from what he truly desires, eternal life. He assures the man that if he takes these steps he will have treasure in heaven (ἐξέλς θησαυρὸν ἐν οὐρανῷ). Likewise, in response to Peter's bold claim that they had left all and followed him, Jesus assures Peter that anyone who forsakes all for his sake and the sake of the gospel will receive back a hundred fold in this age, and in the one to come eternal life (ζωὴν αἰώνιον). The essential point to make here concerning the presentation of God again concerns God

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<sup>42</sup> On the use here of the ancient literary device ἄδυνατον to highlight the impossibility of the salvation of the rich, except by God's power, see Sharyn E. Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering* (SBLDS 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 75-78.

<sup>43</sup> So Lane states, "“Eternal life,” “salvation,” or “entrance into the kingdom” describe a single reality which must be bestowed as his gift to men.” (*Mark*, 248). While Gundry (*Mark*, 566) is correct to make clear that it is God's power that is emphasised in Jesus words concerning what is possible for God, contra Gundry the context of the pericope also places emphasis on the grace God bestows in his giving salvation.

as the one who gives. To the man with many possessions, Jesus says that if he sells those possessions, God will give him treasure in heaven. To the disciples, who have left all to follow Jesus, Jesus promises that God will reward them not only in this life, but also with eternal life in the age to come.

Briefly, then, we may state what the audience is to comprehend concerning God in 10:17-31. First, God is presented in the narrative as good. Secondly God is presented as the one who gives eternal life, salvation, and entrance into the kingdom. Third, God is once again presented as King, and in his kingly power is able to do what is humanly impossible. Finally, God is the one who rewards the faithfulness of disciples of Jesus. Yet, here again, as previously in Mark, a tension is present between the kingdom of God/ eternal life as a gift and requirements placed on those who would receive these gifts. Thus God is seen as both gracious giver of life and as King who demands obedience.

### **Mark 10: 32-45**

The passage beginning with 10:32 introduces the third, and the most detailed, of three passion predictions spoken by Jesus to his disciples. Taylor has demonstrated that this prediction is not only more detailed than the other two, it is also correlated with the events that will take place in the passion narrative itself.<sup>44</sup> Much like the previous passion predictions of 8:31 and 9:31, this prediction is also followed by the portrayal of the disciples' misunderstanding of what Jesus is teaching them concerning his destiny. Moreover, like the prior passion predictions and teachings of Jesus, this prediction and teaching has implicit references to God's activity.

As Jesus and his followers are going up to Jerusalem, a point emphasised by Jesus to his disciples (10:33), Jesus once again tells them of his fate. Like the prior passion prediction, Jesus states that "the Son of Man will be handed over (παραδοθήσεται)." The use of παραδίδωμι in the passive once again implies

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<sup>44</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 436.

God's activity, along with the activity of Judas, in the handing over of Jesus.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, Gundry points out that the forward position of αὐτῷ in 10.34 indicates that what will happen to Jesus "excludes actions of his own doing, i.e. going up to Jerusalem and rising."<sup>46</sup> While Gundry does not push this insight in the direction of viewing God's activity in Jesus' impending suffering<sup>47</sup>, the Markan audience, having heard the two previous passion predictions, and having comprehended the divine necessity of Jesus' death, infers that Jesus here alludes to the divine mandate of his future passion.<sup>48</sup> Therefore, as in the earlier passion predictions, God is implied as the one who has determined Jesus' fate, and is active in bringing about that fate.

The activity of God in the preparation of the destinies of individuals is, however, not limited to Jesus in this pericope. In the ensuing dialogue between Jesus and James and John, a dialogue that is prompted by the two brothers' neglect of Jesus' words and their desire to have places of authority, Jesus diverts attention away from himself toward God. These brothers come to Jesus and ask him for seats of authority when he comes in his glory. Jesus responds to their request with a question concerning whether they are able to share in his cup and baptism, most likely referring to his future suffering.<sup>49</sup> Their response, filled with arrogance, prompts Jesus to comment that they indeed will share in his sufferings, but the seats they have

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<sup>45</sup> For discussion of the use of this verb as a "divine passive" in Mark see the discussions on Mark 1:1-15 and Mark 9:30-50.

<sup>46</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 572.

<sup>47</sup> Gundry rejects the notion that παραδοθήσεται is a divine passive.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson notes that "this road to Jerusalem must be God's way for Jesus", thus indicating that Jesus' destination has been determined by God, and will not be complete until Jerusalem is reached (*Mark*, 253).

<sup>49</sup> The cup (ποτήριον) is a common metaphor for suffering in the Old Testament (See Isa 51:17, 22; Lam 4:21; Ps 75:8; Jer 25:15-28; 49:12; 51:7; Ezek 23:31-34; Hab 2:16; Zech 12:2). While the meaning of βάπτισμα is a bit more difficult to establish in this context, the image of water coming over oneself in the Old Testament carries the idea of disaster (See Pss 42:7; 49:3, 15; 69:2, 15; Job 9:31; 22:11; Isa 30:27 f.; 43:2; Jonah 2:3-6). Yet, Lane is correct in his assessment that "while informed by the OT motifs, the primary key for interpreting the parabolic language of verse 38 is Jesus' messianic task" (Lane, *Mark*, 381). Thus he concludes that the cup that the brothers will drink, and the baptism with which they will be baptised is significantly different from that of Jesus (381). For discussions on the use of cup and baptism see Lane, *Mark*, 379-381; Schweizer, *Mark*, 220-221; Taylor, *Mark*, 440-441; André Feuillet, "La coupe et le baptême de la passion (*Mc*, x, 35-40; cf. *Mt*, xx, 20-23; *Lc*, xii, 50)," *RB* 74 (1967): 356-391.



requested are not under his authority, but are given to those for whom they have been prepared (ἡτοιμάσται).<sup>50</sup> By again using a divine passive, Jesus sets forth the idea that God's activity lies behind who will inherit the seats on either side of Jesus. Moreover, the perfect passive form of ἔτοιμάζω indicates that the request of James and John is meaningless since these seats have already been prepared. This is not to say, as Taylor noted, that the idea presented here carries with it the notion of predestination, but rather it is by God's authority that these seats are prepared, not Jesus', and certainly not James' and John's.<sup>51</sup>

Thus, the Markan audience is intended to hear in the words of Jesus, via the narrative structure of 10:32-45, that God is presented as active in the handing over of Jesus to those who will crucify him. Moreover, God is presented as the authority over the destinies of not only Jesus, but also those who would follow him. It is God to whom Jesus points as the one who has prepared the seats on the right and left of Jesus when he comes in his glory. The audience, then, is to understand that the fate of the followers of Jesus is in the sovereignty of God. Once again, then, God is viewed as the one who determines the mission of the Son of Man *and* his followers.

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<sup>50</sup> As noted by Schweizer ( *Mark*, 222) v. 40b presents a difficulty. The absence of a named subject for ἡτοιμάσται is only part of the problem. Two other problems require brief comments. First, one must decide whether one should take ἄλλ᾽ either as "but," or as "except," as proposed by Matthew Black (*Aramaic Approach to the Gospels and Acts* [New York: Oxford University Press, 1967], 113-114), who is followed by Gundry. Gundry (*Mark*, 578) translates the verse as follows "... is not mine to give except [that it is mine to give] to those for whom it has been prepared [with the implication that it has not been prepared for James and John]." Taken in this sense, Jesus claims authority to give the seats, but not authority to have prepared those seats. Yet it seems to me that we must understand the use of ἄλλ here in its normal sense signifying a contrast. A second problem regards how one understands what or whom has been prepared. J. Muddiman put forth an intriguing proposal. ("The Glory of Jesus, Mark 10:37," in *The Glory of Christ in the New Testament: Studies in Christology in Memory of George Bradford Caird*, 51-58). Muddiman argues that the authority to grant places on the right and left of Jesus in his glory belongs to those who will execute Jesus. He defends this with several points, of which we can only briefly state three: 1) This saying is positioned after the third passion prediction, the only one to explicitly state who will carry out the execution. 2) This is the only one of two places where right and left hand places are mentioned in Mark. The other is found in the Passion Narrative describing the crucifixion of those on either side of Jesus. 3) It is valid to talk about sitting in the context of crucifixion because the victim would be supported by a *sedile* or seat. While this presentation is both novel and attractive, it seems that it disregards the singular use of the verb ἡτοιμάσται. Moreover, it is the *seats* that have been prepared, and not those who have the authority to grant those seats. See Gundry (*Mark*, 578) who notes that regardless how one understands what or whom is prepared, "the passive obliquely refers to God as the preparer."

<sup>51</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 442.



### Mark 11:1-11

After the healing of Blind Bartimaeus in 10:46-52, Jesus begins his entry into Jerusalem, which he had spoken of to the disciples in 10:33. His entry, however, will be one of authority, signified by his riding in on a colt that has been found by two of his disciples. While the Triumphal Entry pictured for the audience here may be intended as Messianic<sup>52</sup>, it also presents to the hearers of the narrative God's role in the coming of Jesus and the coming of the kingdom. This is vividly pictured in the crowd's response to Jesus' entry.

The jubilant celebration begins as the crowd lay both their garments and branches on the road leading into Jerusalem. Moreover, the crowd, possibly recognising the authority of Jesus, begin to cry out praises to God. The Old Testament background of this chant of praise comes from Ps 118:25f, a Psalm which finds its canonical context among the great Hallel Psalms (113-118).<sup>53</sup> While, the first word of their proclamation, Ὡσαννα had the original meaning of calling on God to save, it had become a more general term of praise by the first century.<sup>54</sup> Yet, as Schweizer points out, the term "had a strong eschatological connotation at the time of Jesus and was a call for God's final intervention."<sup>55</sup> This is a significant point, as 11:9 seems itself to convey the eschatological coming of the kingdom with the one who comes in the name of the Lord. Moreover, since Jesus has announced the coming of the kingdom and has acted as the authoritative agent of that kingdom,

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<sup>52</sup> Taylor (*Mark*, 457) suggests that the shouts of the crowd were not intended to be Messianic. However, he does state that Mark may have understood this acclamation as part of the secret of Jesus' identity. We must remember, nevertheless, that for the Markan audience this secret has been known from the beginning of the narrative. Therefore, whether the crowd intends this praise as a Messianic acclamation or not, does not influence the Markan audience's comprehension of it as Messianic. They have known from the beginning that Jesus is the One who has been sent by God, and that the kingdom has come in his arrival. See also E. Lohse, "Ὡσαννα," *TDNT* 9:682-684, who states that Ps 118 was interpreted as Messianic hope, and was echoed in the cry Ὡσαννα.

<sup>53</sup> Lohse, "Ὡσαννα," *TDNT* 9:682.

<sup>54</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 397; Taylor, *Mark*, 456; Schweizer, *Mark*, 228; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, "Aramaic Evidence affecting the Interpretation of Hosanna in the New Testament," in *Tradition and Interpretation in the New Testament: Essays in Honor of E. Earl Ellis*. (eds. G. F. Hawthorne & O. Betz; Grand Rapids, MI: Wm.B. Eerdmans, 1987), 110-118, suggests that the term came to be a cry of greeting or homage voiced to a person entering into Jerusalem.

<sup>55</sup> Schweizer, *Mark*, 228.

Mark intends his audience to understand the crowd as offering praise to both God as sender, and Jesus as the one who is sent. Again, the use of κύριος in Mark is somewhat ambiguous, especially in light of its use in 11:3, where it refers to Jesus, though in 11:9 it most likely refers to God. This is certainly evident in the text from what is shouted at the end of the song, “Ὡσαννα ἐν τοῖς ὑψίστοις.” This phrase represents a clear acclamation of God’s intervention on behalf of his people.<sup>56</sup> Mark intends this as a recognition that God’s help has arrived in the coming of Jesus, and as praise to the God who resides in the highest. Thus, the crowd recognising some form of authority in the entry of Jesus also proclaims him as “the one coming in the name of the Lord.” They recognise that in Jesus the authority of God rests.<sup>57</sup> While it is uncertain whether the crowd recognises that with the coming of Jesus the kingdom also comes<sup>58</sup>, the Markan audience is intended to have this understanding of the triumphal entry.<sup>59</sup>

The crucial question that concerns us, however, regards how God is presented in this processional of acclamation. The presentation of God in this scene is accomplished through the voice of the crowd. Mark uses their cries to reiterate that God has brought about the coming of the kingdom of God in the coming of the one who has been given authority by God. The crowd’s shouts are to the God in the highest, the one who has sent the one coming in the name of the Lord. It is by God’s authority and purpose that Jesus enters Jerusalem. For the audience who have heard Jesus’ passion predictions, and his plain statement in 10.33 about his journey to Jerusalem, this “coming” fulfils what he has stated as divinely intended. Thus, for the first time the audience sees a blending of Jesus’ divinely ordained sufferings, and the coming rule of God. What has been proclaimed about God’s rule, that it is given by God and comes with demands for obedience, and Jesus’ death as God’s will is brought together by Mark here in 11:1-11. Thus God has sent both the herald of

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<sup>56</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 456.

<sup>57</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 631.

<sup>58</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 398.

<sup>59</sup> Lohse, “Ὡσαννα,” 683 states, “(T)he Evangelist wants to emphasise that every Messianic expectation has now been realised” in the coming of Jesus into Jerusalem.”

the kingdom, and the one in whom the kingdom comes through his divinely ordained suffering, death, and resurrection.

### Mark 11: 12-25

The narrative encompassing Jesus' cursing of the fig tree, his cleansing of the temple, and Peter's discovery of the withered fig tree, has been recognised for sometime as Mark's effort to "sandwich" the cleansing of the temple between the two scenes involving the fig tree in order that the symbolism of the withered fig tree be understood by the audience as referring to the temple.<sup>60</sup> While many have attempted to deal with historical problems imbedded in these narrated incidents, our focus will be on a literary analysis of the narrative, and specifically on how God is presented in this narrative.<sup>61</sup>

As Jesus and his disciples come from Bethany, Mark tells us that he was hungry, but that he finds a fig tree without figs, for it was not the time for figs. Jesus then curses the tree. Mark tells his audience that the disciples heard what Jesus said in order to link their recognition of the withered fig tree, which will come in v21.<sup>62</sup> The audience then is left to ponder the results of Jesus' words against the tree until after his words against the activity that is taking place in the temple. After cursing the tree, Jesus goes into the temple, where he finds unacceptable activity taking place, and thus takes it upon himself to drive out those committing these acts. The incident comes to a climax when Jesus begins to teach them that the temple is not a place of thievery, but is to be a place of prayer.

Crucial to the audience's understanding of this event, however, is Jesus' quote of what is written. In stating, "Is it not written...?", Jesus is not claiming his

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<sup>60</sup> On Mark's "sandwich" technique see Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches."

<sup>61</sup> A thorough treatment of issues surrounding Mark's narrative of Jesus' actions against the temple and the fig tree is William Telford, *The Barren Temple and the Withered Tree* (JSNTSup 1; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1980).

<sup>62</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 635. See also Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple: The Trial of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 31; Missoula, MT.: Scholars Press, 1977), 127-136; and John R. Donahue, *Are You the Christ? The Trial Narrative in the Gospel of Mark* (SBLDS 10; Missoula, MT, 1973), 113-122. Both Juel and Donahue highlight the idea that the barren fig tree serves to link barrenness with the temple.

own authority to carry out these actions, but the authority of God, which has been given to him. Against this Gundry has pointed out that since Mark portrays Jesus as teaching (ἐδίδασκεν), he emphasises Jesus' teaching authority. Gundry further states that the *μου* of 11:17 is used by Jesus in reference to himself since he does not claim that his authority comes from anyone else, even God.<sup>63</sup> However, against Gundry I suggest that since Jesus has made a direct reference to what is written, the audience, both of Jesus' words and Mark's Gospel, would understand Jesus as pointing to *God's* authority over the temple. The *μου* simply cannot be taken as Jesus referring to himself, since it is prefaced by *γέγραπται*. Moreover, the audience has known all along that the source of Jesus' authority is God. This knowledge, as we have pointed out, is a privilege that only the audience holds. In fact, the leaders will soon ask Jesus where he gets such authority (11: 28). It is not conceivable that this would change at this point, though Jesus does not make a direct claim to be acting on God's authority here, except that he authoritatively uses the Old Testament. He has understood his mission as divinely set forth, and here his actions in the temple are not carried out because of his authority alone, but because of the authority of God over the temple, which Jesus designates as a place of prayer.<sup>64</sup> Thus God is presented through Jesus' quotation of the Old Testament passage which prescribes the proper intention and activity of the temple.

The emphasis on prayer is carried forth into the verses that detail the discovery by Peter of the withered fig tree Jesus had previously cursed. In response to Peter's concern over the dead tree, Jesus commands him to have faith in God. This is the first point in Mark's Gospel where others are called by Jesus to have faith in God. At other points in the story they have simply been called to have faith, with no object explicitly identified. But here Jesus emphasises the need for faith in God because he gives instructions concerning prayer, which in Mark is always voiced to God. As the temple was to be a "house of prayer", so believers are now to be people of prayer, who have faith in the God who can accomplish what is impossible for

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<sup>63</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 640.

<sup>64</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 464, calls the words of 17a "the divine intention" for the temple.

humans.<sup>65</sup> Jesus illustrates his point in the statement concerning mountain moving in 11:23.

In making this statement, Jesus proposes that the impossible can happen when one has faith in God through prayer. Moreover, through the use of the divine passives, ἄρθητι and βλήθητι, and the periphrastic phrase λαλεῖ γίνεται, ἔσται αὐτῷ, he indicates that God is the one who has the power to accomplish what is humanly impossible.<sup>66</sup> Further, Sharyn Dowd has pointed out that the emphasis on God in this narrative not only highlights that God can do the impossible, but guards against those who may think that the miracles performed by the disciples are carried out through magic.<sup>67</sup>

This authority of God is brought out further in Jesus' prescription for correct prayer. He calls on anyone who has something against another to forgive. The reason for the necessity of forgiving is "so that (ὅνα) your Father in heaven may also forgive you your trespasses." This is the first time in Mark that Jesus has directly called God the Father of others. We have already seen that God has identified Jesus as God's Son, and that Jesus alludes to God as his Father (8:38). But here, God is called the Father of Jesus' followers, and not of Jesus. In other words, what has been known to be true of Jesus' relationship to God, and possibly implied through Jesus' words in 3:31-35, 9:37 and 10:13-16, is now stated clearly about the followers' of Jesus and their relationship to God. While one must draw out these implications with much care, it is not improbable that Mark is requiring his audience to think back to what has been defined as Jesus' true family (3:31-35), and to see themselves, as they

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<sup>65</sup> See Dowd, *Prayer*, 52-55.

<sup>66</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 652; John P. Heil, "The Narrative Strategy and Pragmatics of the Temple Theme in Mark," *CBQ* 59 (1997): 79. See also van Iersel (*Mark*, 360) who states, "The introduction in v. 22, 'Have faith in God', as well as the last words of v. 23, 'it will be done for you' (ἔσται αὐτῷ), leave no doubt that the cursing of the mountain depends for its fulfillment on God." We may additionally point out that the theme of the importance of prayer for power was previously at the forefront in Mark when Jesus tells the disciples who could not cast out the evil spirit from the boy in Mk. 9, that this kind can only come out through prayer and fasting. Moreover, Jesus has already placed prominence on God's ability to perform the impossible in response to the disciple's worry over who could be saved if the rich could not (10:26-27).

<sup>67</sup> Dowd, *Prayer*, 64.

carry out their forgiveness of one another as a part of God's will, as members of Jesus' family, and thus in special relation to God. Hence, Jesus reiterates clearly to his followers what he had stated earlier about their relationship to himself and to God as well. As they have been called the "brothers and sisters" of Jesus, so now they are called children of the "Father in heaven."<sup>68</sup> God, then, is presented as the Father of those followers of Jesus.<sup>69</sup>

Furthermore, in Jesus' statement concerning the requirement of forgiving others so that God will forgive, he defines God as the one who forgives. We have seen previously how the Markan Jesus presents God as the one who forgives by using the "divine passive" (2:5). Now, however, Jesus states forthrightly that God extends forgiveness to the followers of Jesus who also extend forgiveness to anyone (τινος) against whom they may have something. God's forgiveness, then, is not dependent on the stability of the temple and its reliance on the moneychangers' presence for the cultic act of sacrifice<sup>70</sup>, but reaches beyond the bounds of the temple walls. Thus, in their actions of prayer, preceded by their extension of forgiveness to others, the disciples themselves are forgiven, and indeed demonstrate their faith in the all-powerful God, who is able to do what is humanly impossible. Moreover, the

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<sup>68</sup> Heil ("The Temple Theme in Mark," 80n10) states, "The reference to God as 'your Father who is in heaven' contributes to Mark's anti-temple theme. Although the temple was the special place of God's presence on earth, his true dwelling place is in heaven, from where he hears prayers and grants forgiveness of sins."

<sup>69</sup> Both Telford, *Barren Temple*, 49-54 and H. F. D. Sparks, "The Doctrine of the Divine Fatherhood in the Gospels," in *Studies in the Gospels: Essays in Memory of R.H. Lightfoot* (ed. D. E. Nineham; Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1955), 244-246, argue that, along with 11:26, v. 25 is suspect. They base their assumptions on the improbability that v. 26 is original to Mark, and on the dissimilarity of v. 25 with the style of Mark, indicating that the style of the verse is more in line with Matthew than Mark. Against this, we may suggest that they wrongly base their arguments only on internal evidence and do not give any external evidence as proof. It is better to follow the argument of Dowd, *Prayer*, 37-55, who shows that the cleansing of the temple would have nullified the efficacy of the temple in both the mind of the disciples and Mark's audience. Therefore, a new community of prayer would be necessary to invoke the power of God, which is conditioned on the community's faith and forgiveness (Dowd, 63-66).

<sup>70</sup> Jacob Neusner, "Money-Changers in the Temple: The Mishnah's Explanation," *NTS* 35 (1989): 289, states, "(T)he moneychangers' presence made possible the cultic participation of every Israelite."



Markan audience, probably knowing the temple's demise, or even its destruction, is reassured that God's forgiveness is not nullified by the temple's ineffectiveness.<sup>71</sup>

Mark 11:12-25, therefore, presents to the Markan audience characterisations of God that are familiar from their previous hearings, but with slight variations. God is portrayed, through the words of Jesus in the temple, as the "master" of the house, the temple, who, through the actions and words of Jesus, is viewed as angry at what the temple has become instead of what it was intended to be. God is also presented as the one in whom Jesus' followers are to have faith, knowing that God is the one who can do things that are impossible for humans.<sup>72</sup> God is also spoken of as the Father who hears the faithful prayers of the disciple, and who, based on the disciple's forgiveness of others, forgives the sins of that disciple.

### Mark 11:27-12:12

Jesus again enters into conflict with the religious leaders, who question his authority for carrying out such actions in the temple<sup>73</sup>, and who in 12:12 seek a way to arrest him for both his actions and his words. At issue for our reading, however, is the question asked by these leaders, and the parable Jesus gives, both of which have obvious ramifications for Jesus' fate and the Markan audience's understanding of God.

The question over Jesus' authority has been an issue among the characters throughout the narrative.<sup>74</sup> It is in fact the central issue that surrounds Jesus' identity, and also the questions posed by characters concerning that identity. In

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<sup>71</sup> Garland, *Mark*, 442.

<sup>72</sup> The statement by Jesus presents of course a philosophical problem. Can God do what is impossible for humans? While it is beyond the scope of this project to deal with this problem, I would direct the reader's attention to Dowd's discussion on the Hellenistic debate surrounding God's omnipotence (*Prayer*, 69-94). We can conclude, along with Dowd, that, "Affirmation of the omnipotence of God and of God's agency in the world is essential to Mark's theology of prayer; that is why the prayer logia collection begins with the saying about the mountain." (93).

<sup>73</sup> Most commentators agree that the ταῦτα of v. 28 refers back to Jesus' act of cleansing the temple.

<sup>74</sup> Mary Ann Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel Mark's World in Literary-Historical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 233.



11:27-33, however, we find the religious leaders directly confronting Jesus about his actions in the temple, asking him to give some basis of authority for these actions. They seek, not to discover the source, but rather to trap Jesus. They would never assume that his authority was from God, possibly because he refused to give them a sign in 8:12. Yet, as we have previously pointed out, the Markan audience is not in the dark concerning the source of Jesus' authority. They have known full well that the source of his authority is God. These religious leaders, however, *are* given the answer they seek, but in the form of Jesus' counter-question to them.

In response to their question, Jesus counters with a question of his own concerning what these leaders believe about the baptism of John. The choice that Jesus puts before them is for them to admit that John's baptism is from God, using *οὐρανοῦ* as a periphrastic for God, or admit that it is from man. These leaders, perplexed as to how to answer Jesus' question, decide that it is best to answer that they do not know. If they had chosen to answer that it was from God, then they would have indeed answered the question they put to Jesus.<sup>75</sup> For the Markan audience, however, this further serves to present God as the source of Jesus' authority. They remember how the narrator designated John as the messenger sent by God. They also remember that it was John who was baptising in the wilderness, a baptism to which all Judea and Jerusalem were submitting. Moreover, and most importantly, they remember that John has divine authority to baptise the beloved Son of God. It is the very voice of God in 1:11 that not only expresses pleasure with the Son, but also legitimates John's baptism. As van Iersel has stated, "John received his mandate from none other than God himself."<sup>76</sup>

Thus the Markan audience is privy once again to the previous parts of the story. Having heard the previous validation of Jesus' authority, and the source of that authority, they are able to answer the religious leaders' question. The Jewish leaders, however, are left in the dark as to Jesus' authority. Although the very answer they seek is inherent in the question that Jesus posed to them, they refuse to

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<sup>75</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 471.

<sup>76</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 362; See also Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1983, 1989), 189.

hear, something that is clearly reminiscent in light of Jesus' warning about hearing and understanding given in the Parable of the Sower.

It is the Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen, however, which these leaders do clearly hear, and indeed understand.<sup>77</sup> Many commentators have pointed out that the parable is parallel to the Song of the Vineyard found in Isaiah 5:1-7.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, Jeremias suggested that the parable is an allegory, and the various figures in the parable are symbolic. While space and the intention here prevent a discussion of the intricacies of these symbols, we can briefly state what most have accepted regarding these symbols.<sup>79</sup> In the parable the vineyard symbolises the people of Israel as receiving the privileges of God<sup>80</sup>, the tenants, Israel's rulers and leaders, the messengers, the prophets<sup>81</sup>, the owner, God, and the son, Jesus.<sup>82</sup> Jesus states that the owner of a field leased the field that he had planted to some tenants. When the time came for the harvest, he sent slaves to the tenants in order to collect what was

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<sup>77</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel* 234) states, "Jesus' initial refusal, followed immediately by his indirect articulation, is a narrative example of *paraleipsis*, a common rhetorical ploy of saying 'that we are passing by, or do not know, or refuse to say that which precisely now we are saying.' What he says he will not tell them (11:33b), he now tells them 'in parables' (12:1a), and his opponents' recognition of the maneuver is clear from their response."

<sup>78</sup> See Craig A. Evans, "On the Vineyard Parables of Isaiah 5 and Mark 12," *BZ* nf 28 (1984), 82-86; and W. J. C. Weren, "The Use of Isaiah 5,1-7 in the Parable of the Tenants (Mark 12,1-12; Matthew 21,33-46)," *Bib* 79 (1998), 1-26. See also Rikki E. Watts (*Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* [WUNT 88; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1997], 342) who in noting that there are slight variations between the Isaiah 5 passage and the parable of Mark 12, states, "No longer is the concern about the quality of the fruit nor is the vineyard *en toto* to be destroyed, but rather the tenants."

<sup>79</sup> See Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus*. 2d ed. (trans. S. H. Hooke; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972), 70; Evans, "Vineyard Parables," 84-85; and Klyne Snodgrass, *The Parable of the Wicked Tenants* (WUNT 27; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983), 72-106.

<sup>80</sup> Snodgrass, *Wicked Tenants*, 73-77 clarifies this understanding of the vineyard.

<sup>81</sup> See Snodgrass, *Wicked Tenants*, 78n25 for a list of Old Testament texts in which the prophets of God are designated as servants. Given the previous discussion about John between Jesus and the religious leaders, and the narrated execution of John in Mark's Gospel, we may follow Hurtado (*Mark*, 190) in stating that John is included among the prophets spoken of in the parable.

<sup>82</sup> Aaron Milavec, "The Identity of 'the son' and 'the others': Mark's Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen Reconsidered," *BTB* 20 (1990) 30-37, argues that "the son" of the parable is not Jesus, but is Israel. However, as Heil ("Temple Theme in Mark," 81n13) points out, Jesus has already been designated as υἱός ἀγαπητός by God. See also van Iersel, *Mark*, 365. On the issue of whether or not the historical Jesus understood himself as the Son in the parable and conveyed that to his audience is thoroughly discussed by Snodgrass, *Wicked Tenants*, 80-87. It is not important to my argument whether the historical Jesus did or did not have this understanding. The Markan narrative is clear in its presentation of Jesus as the Son.

his. Each slave sent was killed by these tenants, until the owner chose to send his beloved son (υἰὸν ἀγαπητόν).<sup>83</sup> Yet these tenants also killed the son, and threw him out of the vineyard. Jesus, then, asks those around him about what the “master” (ὁ κύριος) will do. He then answers his own question by stating that the owner will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others. At this point Jesus moves from giving the parable concerning the tenants, to quoting Ps 117:22-23 (LXX).<sup>84</sup> In doing so he changes the emphasis from the beloved son who is rejected and killed by the tenants, to the stone that the builders rejected, and yet has become the corner stone. Marcus has pointed out that this shift from the parable to the quotation is also a shift from what is pessimistic to what is victorious.<sup>85</sup> Within the parable itself, the son remains dead. In Jesus’ appropriation of Ps 117:22, however, the son becomes the stone, and vindication is realised.

While the narrative is explicit about what this parable conveys to the religious leaders, we must carefully investigate what it implies concerning the characterisation of God. To begin, if we accept that the owner is symbolic of God, there are a number of things that are clear from this parable. First, God is the primary character in the story, being both the owner of the field, and the one who sends forth slaves, and his own son. Second, the parable includes a reference that reaches backwards in the history of Israel, much like the way Mark uses “Isaiah” in the opening verses of the Gospel. In the parable, God is designated as the one who has sent forth prophets in the past, prophets whose message concerning God’s will was rejected. Third, by stating that the owner sent his beloved son, Jesus implies that this son is himself, and designates himself as the Son of God. Therefore, God is once again presented in special relationship to Jesus. Fourth, since the owner will come and give the

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<sup>83</sup> Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel*, 235) notes that with the sending of each slave comes an increasing pattern of violence. This, of course, adds to the portrayal of the tenants as wicked.

<sup>84</sup> For a defence of the quotation of Psalm 117 as being well-placed see Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 344-346.

<sup>85</sup> Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 112.

vineyard to “others”, Jesus presents God as the one who will give over to “others” the kingdom of God.<sup>86</sup>

We may even suggest that in the quotation of Ps 117 (LXX), Jesus claims victory for himself, as well as characterises God for his listeners. This victory is based on God’s faithfulness to the Son, as demonstrated throughout the narrative. Here, however, the idea that is conveyed is the raising up of the stone, the one the builders themselves have rejected (ἀπεδοκίμασαν); a verb which is also used by Jesus in 8:31 to speak of the rejection of the Son of Man by the elders, chief priests, and scribes. In this respect, then, through Jesus’ quote of Ps 117, and especially the inclusion of the phrase “παρὰ κυρίου ἐγένετο αὕτη”, where κυρίου clearly refers to God, the idea that is communicated to the Markan audience is that God will vindicate the Son who is rejected and killed. The pattern set forth in the parable and the saying about the stone resembles somewhat the pattern of the passion predictions in which Jesus speaks of his suffering, death, and resurrection.<sup>87</sup> The parable, along with the use of Ps 117 (LXX), sets forth the idea that God will be victorious in the raising of his Son.<sup>88</sup>

We may also state something about the characterisation of God in light of the owner’s actions toward the tenants. First, in sending slave after slave to request from the tenants what is rightfully his, the owner demonstrates great patience with the tenants.<sup>89</sup> Second, the owner seems to express at least some degree of trust in the

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<sup>86</sup> Much discussion has taken place as to who “the others” represent. It is beyond the scope of this discussion to argue extensively for a particular view. However, it seems that the more probable and accepted view among scholars is that “the others” refers to the disciples who will become the new people of God. See Howard C. Kee, “The Function of Scriptural Quotations and Allusions in Mark 11-16,” in *Jesus und Paulus: Festschrift für Werner Georg Kümmel*. (eds. E.E.Ellis & E.Grässer; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1975), 176.

<sup>87</sup> Snodgrass, *Wicked Tenants*, 99-100. Although Snodgrass (102) suggests that the idea of resurrection is probably not in the mind of the historical Jesus, he admits that the early Church understood the raising of the stone in this way. Thus Mark also may intend this understanding.

<sup>88</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 690; van Iersel, *Mark*, 369.

<sup>89</sup> See Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 235-36, whose reading brought to my attention the mention of many others (πολλοὺς ἄλλους) who were killed by the tenants. Cf. Watts, *Isaiah’s New Exodus*, 343.

tenants when he states that the tenants will surely respect the son.<sup>90</sup> Thirdly, however, the owner's patience and trust is seen as diminishing when Jesus declares what will happen to both the tenants and the vineyard. We may state, then, that God is characterised as a patient God in this parable, but that patience is not without limits.<sup>91</sup> The religious leaders have shown and continue to show hostility to Jesus, the Son of God. Due to this hostility and the eventual death of the Son, God's patience with them will be brought to an end as their authority will be vanquished and a new people of God will be inaugurated.

In this pericope of conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders, then, the Markan audience hears the characterisation of God on several different levels. First, once again God is presented as the source of Jesus' authority to cleanse the temple, as well as the source of John's authority to baptise. Moreover, through the telling of the parable, God is presented as the one who has planted the vineyard, and who, in the face of unfaithful tenants, patiently sends forth prophets, and his beloved son, hoping that the tenants/leaders will listen. Yet, in response to their rebellion, God is the one who takes the vineyard from them and gives it to others. As master (ὁ κύριος) of the vineyard, he will act as judge over those under his authority. Moreover, although these have rejected and killed the beloved Son, God is presented as the one who will raise the Son/stone. Thus God is presented as the source of authority and the overseer of the destiny of the vineyard, the tenants, others and the Son, and as the one who is ultimately victorious.

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<sup>90</sup> Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel*, 236 states, "Every opportunity is to be offered these tenants to repent of their lawless actions, even if it means imperilling a precious child."

<sup>91</sup> Evans ("Vineyard Parables," 86) argues that the same interpretation underlying Isaiah 5:1-7 underlies the parable in Mark. He suggests that Isaiah would have prophesied against the unfaithfulness of Israel in the face of their election by God. So too, Mark uses the parable to demonstrate the unfaithfulness of the religious leaders, thus capturing "the essence of the Old Testament prophetic critique against unwarranted assumptions regarding God's grace and election."

### Mark 12:13-34

Mark 12:13-34 forms a literary unit containing a series of dialogues between Jesus and others regarding various themes, but all surrounding God.<sup>92</sup> The term θεός is used in this sub-unit twelve times out of the forty-nine times it is used in the entire Gospel, and is at the centre of each of Jesus' teachings. While the topics that are addressed by Jesus are different, he uses each opportunity to teach his listeners concerning God and their response to God. Moreover, as will be argued in the following discussion, Mark also intends his audience to understand the *theo*-logical emphasis of this pericope and to respond in their discipleship.

The question brought to Jesus concerning paying taxes to Caesar is introduced by Mark's clue to the audience that the question is not one asked in order to receive an answer, but is asked by some Pharisees and Herodians in order to trap Jesus by what he says. They approach Jesus with a sense of sarcastic veneration, heaping on him attributes that seem to go over the top, calling him "teacher", impartial, and a teacher of the way of God. Ironically, their smooth talk serves Mark's purpose in portraying Jesus just as they have said, a fact emphasised throughout 12:13-34. But their intentions are not hidden from Mark's audience, and his audience is indeed prepared to listen to the reliable voice of Jesus, over against the unreliable voices of these religious leaders, who ask, "Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?" Mark, again acting as the omniscient narrator, tells his audience that Jesus knows their hypocrisy, and therefore confronts them with their true motives of putting Jesus to the test. Then Jesus asks for a denarius and, in typical fashion, confronts them with a question. They answer his question concerning whose head is on the coin, and Jesus responds by telling them that they are to give to Caesar the things which are Caesar's (τὰ Καίσαρος) and to God the things which are God's (τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ). Thus Jesus moves the trick question of these leaders beyond a discussion over paying taxes to Caesar, to giving to God what belongs to God.

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<sup>92</sup> John R. Donahue ("A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark," *JBL* 101 [1982]: 572) states that 12:13-34 forms "a quasi-independent sub-unit" within Mark's Gospel.



For Mark's audience, Jesus' words call them to understand the sovereignty of God over them. In other words, as Jesus has declared that the coin containing the image of the emperor belongs to the emperor, so the disciple, who has the image of the sovereign God belongs to God.<sup>93</sup> Yet, the meaning of Jesus' saying runs deeper than this for Mark's narrative. First, we can state that Jesus' saying concerning the "things of God" may be thematically linked to the parable of 12:1-12. The tenants' initial guilt was their refusal to give to the κύριος of the vineyard what was rightfully his, and this carried through to their supreme guilt of murder. Second, the phrase τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ is used one other time in Mark 8:33, where Jesus rebukes Peter for not thinking "the things of God but (ἀλλὰ) of man." Jesus' saying in 12:17 is not only linked by this phrase, but also by the contrast that is emphasised between God and humans. In both passages Mark sets clear distinctions between the things of God and the things of humans/ Caesar.<sup>94</sup> Moreover, as both Gundry and Heil have suggested, τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ in 8:33 occurs in the context of Jesus' first passion prediction.<sup>95</sup> Jesus' rebuke of Peter is that he tempts Jesus to give up the notion of dying. But Jesus has defined his destiny in terms of God's will. This idea of Jesus' determination to give to God the things of God is brought out further by Mark when he places on the lips of the Pharisees and Herodians his key phrase for Jesus' mission in the Gospel narrative. These leaders, in their flattery, tell Jesus that he teaches "the way of God in accordance with the truth" (12:14). Mark's metaphor

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<sup>93</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 425; Charles H. Gibling, " 'The Things of God' in the Question Concerning Tribute to Caesar (Lk 20:25; Mk 12:17; Mt 22:21)," *CBQ* 33 (1971): 510-527. Gundry, *Mark*, 700 argues against the idea that Jesus intends to imply a reference to the "image of God", which would mean that "the things of God" is taken as human beings. He states that "the image of God" is not mentioned in the passage and can only be inferred from the "image" of Caesar on the coin. While Gundry's point is well taken, it is probable that the Markan audience would deduce this sense from Jesus' statement.

<sup>94</sup> This point would be particularly interesting if, as many Markan scholars propose, the audience to which Mark is writing is in proximity to Rome. Knowing full well that the image of Caesar on the coin reflected the belief in the deity of the emperor, the audience would understand Jesus' contrast between Caesar and God as declaring that the One God is greater than all quasi-gods.

<sup>95</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 694; Heil, "Temple Theme," 83.



for discipleship, as any reader of the Gospel will recognise is ἡ ὁδός.<sup>96</sup> Out of the sixteen times this term is used in the Gospel, however, here we find the only use of it where it is modified by θεός. These “leaders” sarcastically confess that Jesus is the teacher of the way of God, but Mark uses this admission to his own end. By linking the two genitives (τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ θεοῦ and τὰ τοῦ θεοῦ) in the context of 12:13-17, and alluding to the context of Jesus’ only other use of the phrase “the things of God” in 8:33, Mark intends to show that Jesus is not only the teacher of the “way of God”, he is indeed the one who models what it means to give to God “the things of God” by his following “the way of God”. Thus, the things of God in Mark’s narrative are reflected in Jesus’ obedient observance of God’s commands, and indeed in the giving of his own life (10:45). The audience, then, is to determine their own discipleship in terms of Jesus’ teaching and actions which are submissive to *God*, not humans or Caesar. God, therefore, is presented as the one who has supreme authority over Jesus and any would be disciples (Cf. 3:35).

Mark 12:18-27 continues Jesus’ dialogue with others, this time with a group of Sadducees. These Sadducees are not sent like the Pharisees and Herodians were sent in the previous narrative; they come on their own. Moreover, Mark does not tell his audience that the Sadducees come to trap Jesus, but this may be implied from Mark’s up-front statement that the Sadducees “say there is no resurrection” (λέγουσιν ἀνάστασιν μὴ εἶναι). Thus the audience, on hearing the Sadducees’ question concerning the resurrection, realises that their motives are suspect. Moreover, their dependence on what Moses had written, and Jesus’ accusation (twice) of their not knowing the scriptures further sets them apart. Mark’s hearers again are confronted with hearing the reliable voice of Jesus, over the unreliable voices of the Sadducees.

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<sup>96</sup> On Mark’s use of ὁδός see Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*; and William M. Swartley. “The Structural Function of the Term ‘Way’ in Mark,” in *The New Way of Jesus: Essays Presented to Howard Charles*. (ed. W. Klassen; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1980), 73-76.

Using an overstated illustration<sup>97</sup> reflecting the literal obedience to the levirate marriage law found in Deut 25:5-10, these Sadducees ask Jesus, “In the resurrection whose wife will she be?” Jesus’ answer moves beyond their concern, even avoiding their question altogether. He sees the intention of their query and chooses to divert their intentions to his own, to teach concerning God. In doing so, he accuses them of not knowing the scriptures, but more importantly of not knowing the power (δύναμιν) of God. Further, Jesus states clearly that “they” will rise from the dead, not to be married, but to be as angels in heaven. Then, using scripture to his own end, Jesus reminds them that *God* had told Moses, “I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob” (12:26). Jesus then implies that God’s intention in this statement was to define himself as the God of the living and not of the dead. To draw out the theological significance for the audience’s understanding of Mark’s view of God, however, requires a more detailed discussion of Jesus’ words.

The use of δύναμις to this point in Mark has been used primarily in relation to Jesus’ power to perform miracles, with the exception of 9:1 where Jesus states that the “kingdom of God has come with power”, and the reference to others doing “deeds of power” in Jesus’ name in 9:39. In 12:24, however, Jesus uses it in reference to God’s power to raise the dead. This theme is not new to Mark’s audience, for Jesus has already predicted his own resurrection (8:31;9:31;10:34), and the audience, knowing that it is the power of God at work in Jesus, understands that Jesus’ own resurrection will come by the power of God. Moreover, Jesus states that this resurrection is also the resurrection of those “being raised” (ἐγείρονται). In using the passive ἐγείρονται, Jesus implies that it is indeed God who raises the dead.<sup>98</sup> Further, the question of the Sadducees, “Whose shall she be?” pictures their sceptical understanding of any resurrection as a future occurrence. But Jesus moves

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<sup>97</sup> Probably related to a similar story in Tob 3:8, 15; 6:13; 7:11. See Lane, *Mark*, 427.

<sup>98</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 703.

this understanding to the present, again using the present tense ἐγείρονται, and his quotation of Scripture.

The use of Exod 3:6 by Jesus as a basis for arguing for God as the God of the living has presented problems for Markan scholars. Does this quotation assume that the Patriarchs mentioned in God's message to Moses are alive? Certainly, this would seem to be Jesus' meaning. Yet, a closer look at Jesus' words draws out a better understanding. He has stated that these Sadducees do not know the power of God, i.e. the power of God to deliver from death. Moreover, he has stated without reservation that the dead are being raised. In his quotation of Exod 3:6 could Jesus be emphasising God as the living God whose power is active in the deliverance of his people? The context of Exod 3:6 adds weight to this suggestion. In Exod 3 Moses is called by God to be the agent of God's power to deliver his people from Egypt. In response to Moses' question about the identity of the one who speaks to him from the burning bush, God responds with the phrase quoted by Jesus in Mark 12:26. In responding to Moses in this way, God uses his covenant name, signifying his promise made to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.<sup>99</sup> By using the text of Exod 3:6, and having emphasised the power of God to raise the dead, Jesus teaches that God's covenant promise is effected through God's power to save. Thus, Jesus accentuates God as the living and powerful God who is the God of the living and not the dead.<sup>100</sup> It is this God whom, because of their disbelief in the resurrection, and more importantly their not knowing the power of God, these Sadducees do not know.

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<sup>99</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 196. Cf. John R. Donahue, "The Revelation of God in the Gospel of Mark," in *Modern Biblical Scholarship: Its Impact on Theology and Proclamation*. (ed. F.A. Eigo; Villanova: Villanova University Press, 1984), 164 seems also to allude to this understanding of Jesus' use of Exod. 3:6.

<sup>100</sup> Morna D. Hooker, "Mark," in *It is Written: Scripture Citing Scripture: Essays in Honour of Barnabas Lindars*. (ed. D. A. Carson and H. G. M. Williamson; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 223 argues that Mark sets the two Old Testament passages, Deut 25 and Exod 3, over against one another, and establishes that the Exod 3 passage is presented as overthrowing the other because Jesus is the authoritative exponent of Scripture, and because the Sadducees do not recognise the power of God working in Jesus. Although I agree with Hooker's conclusions, this still does not answer the question as to why Exod 3:6 was chosen to refute the Sadducees' question. It seems that the argument I have presented here helps to answer this question.

Although Jesus' point is not to answer the question of the Sadducees, he does tell them that the risen dead "neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are like angels in heaven." Through this statement of Jesus, Mark communicates to his audience a brief word about the nature of the resurrection. What does Jesus mean by the statement, "but are like angels in heaven"? First it is probable that this is one more jab at the Sadducees who did not believe in angels.<sup>101</sup> Second, one may understand the reference as clarifying what Jesus relates concerning life in the resurrection. In other words, if angels did not marry, then humans will not be given in marriage in the resurrection. But more importantly, it may say something about the purpose of the resurrection. Angels are pictured throughout the biblical story as agents of God, who are in service to God and in commune with God.<sup>102</sup> Moreover, by stating that they will be "like angels in heaven (ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς)" Jesus implies that these angels are present with the living God who resides in heaven. Consequently, those who are being raised by the power of God are indeed in the presence of the living God serving God. Thus, Jesus turns the Sadducees' hypothetical scenario, intended to trick Jesus, into an opportunity to teach authoritatively about the power of the living God to raise the dead.

Following Jesus' encounter with the Sadducees, a scribe, who has witnessed that Jesus answered them well, comes to ask Jesus a question. He states, "Which commandment is first of all?" Jesus, again being the reliable voice of the narrative, answers not just which commandment is the greatest, but also which one is second. Using Deut 6:4-5, Jesus confirms what the Jews held to be the fundamental truth about God. The emphasis of Jesus' answer is on the God of Israel as the only true God, and on the commandment that love of the one God is demanded. Yet, Jesus is keen to include in his answer that the second commandment is to love one's neighbour as one's self, a quote from Lev 12:31. This additional answer may, of course, surprise the Markan audience, who expects Jesus to answer only the scribe's

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<sup>101</sup> Hurtado, Mark, 195.

<sup>102</sup> On angels see Carol A. Newsom and Duane F. Watson, "Angels," *ABD* 1:248-255, and the literature cited there.

question. But the scribe affirms Jesus' answers, even stating that these commandments are greater than burnt offerings to God. Jesus, hearing the man's response states, "You are not far from the kingdom of God." This answer may surprise Mark's listeners, not because the man has spoken wrongly, but because for the first and only time a scribe is cast in a positive light in the narrative. What, however, does this scene imply about God for the Markan audience?

First, we may state that Mark confirms for his audience the truth that the God of Israel is the one true God.<sup>103</sup> We have seen throughout our discussion Mark's blending of Christology and theology. Jesus acts with the authority of God, and is addressed by the use of terms that are normally reserved for God. But here, Mark affirms that God is one, and there is no other God beside the One God of Israel. Moreover, this reflects what Jesus has taught throughout the narrative. His teaching has centred on the kingdom of the One God and doing the will of the One God. What is crucial, however, in Jesus' answer to the scribe's question is the inclusion of the "second" commandment. In stating that one is to love one's neighbour, Jesus is teaching what has been reflected in his actions towards others. Although it is not explicitly stated in the Gospel, Mark shows his audience through Jesus' healings and exorcisms that he fulfils what he now states is the second greatest commandment. In fact, it may be said that his actions throughout the narrative fulfil both commandments, in that his actions are the will of God, and are acts of love for his neighbour. Thus in Mark's presentation of Jesus as the one who both teaches and goes the way of God, Jesus is seen as living out these two commandments, which are, apparently in the mind of Jesus, inextricably linked.<sup>104</sup> Mark, then, uses Jesus to confirm that theological truth is centred on the belief in the one God and the love and commitment to that one God. Moreover, through Jesus' words concerning the love of one's neighbour, and the inseparable connection with the belief in and love of the one God, Mark implies to his audience that discipleship is defined by the love one

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<sup>103</sup> Donahue ("Neglected Factor," 580) notes that Mark's emphasis on the one God would be particularly crucial for Mark's audience who most likely live in a polytheistic culture.

<sup>104</sup> Van Iersel (*Mark*, 379) thinks that Jesus' answer implies that these two commandments cannot be kept without each another.

has for God and neighbour. This is furthered by Jesus' statement that the scribe is not far from the kingdom of God, because he affirms that these two commandments are the greatest. Jesus has taught concerning the rule of God, and here the scribe is not far from that rule. Mark intends to show his audience that God's kingdom is characterised by love of the one God and love of one's neighbour. Thus, the theological implications of Jesus' words also have ethical dimensions. God, then, is presented as the one God who rules, and who demands both love of God and love of neighbours.

We have seen in this discussion that the pericope of Mark 12:13-34 is explicitly theological. Jesus is presented in these verses as the authoritative voice that speaks for and about God. Moreover, in each of his responses he moves the discussion further than those questioning him do. Through Jesus' words, Mark is able to present to his audience a portrait of God as the one true God to whom belongs their obedience and love. Furthermore, he has shown that God is all-powerful and able to raise the dead. In fact, for the Markan Jesus, God is not the God of the dead, but the God of the living, and thus the living and active God. This God, moreover, is the one God who demands not only love of God, but also love of one's neighbours. It is this ethic then that characterises the kingdom under God's rule, and is modelled by the beloved Son.

### **Mark 12:35-37**

The question of Jesus' identity arises again, this time initiated by Jesus himself. Although the reference to Jesus is veiled in this passage, that is Jesus never states that he is the Christ, the audience understands that Jesus' identity is the central topic of concern. Therefore the thrust of the passage is christological. Yet, behind the Christology of 12:35-37 lies a *theo*-logy, which explicates both God's relationship to the Christ and God's actions on behalf of the Messiah.

Having confirmed the correct understanding of the scribe regarding the two greatest commandments, Jesus turns to address what the scribes say concerning the



Christ. The formation of his question, and the following asyndeton, establish a contrast between what the scribes say, and what David himself said concerning the Messiah.<sup>105</sup> Jesus asks, “How do the scribes say that the Messiah is the son of David?” His reasoning for such a question rests on his understanding that it was David himself (αὐτὸς) who spoke by the Holy Spirit (ἐν τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἁγίῳ) concerning the Christ. Moreover, Jesus understands David’s words from Ps 110:1 as referring to the Messiah who David himself calls lord (αὐτὸς Δαυὶδ λέγει αὐτὸν κύριον). Thus, Jesus takes the scribes’ understanding of the Christ as the Son of David, and, implies, using words from David himself as he spoke in the Holy Spirit, that the Messiah cannot only be Son of David, but that a more suitable title for the Christ must exist over and above that of Son of David.<sup>106</sup> A title, which we will discover, places the Messiah in relation to God.

The authority of God has been at the heart of Jesus’ teaching throughout his ministry in Mark’s Gospel. Moreover, the audience has been presented with intense theological teaching from the Markan Jesus throughout chapter 12. It seems, then, that in Mark 12:35-37, Jesus desires again to push the religious ideas of the authorities beyond the realm of the human plane toward the realm where God’s authority rules.<sup>107</sup> He does so through a number of moves.

First, Jesus states that the scribes say that the Christ is the Son of David. Listeners of Jesus would accept that the scribes are authorities on the scriptures, and Jesus implies their knowledge of that authority in his question. But over against this authority, Jesus places the authority of God. Jesus does this through his statement that David spoke by the Holy Spirit. David, unlike the scribes, spoke as a prophet

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<sup>105</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 718.

<sup>106</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 437; Hurtado, *Mark*, 204. See also Werner Kelber (*The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and A New Time* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974], 95n24) who cites several scholars who argue that Jesus rejects Davidic sonship in favour of sonship of God. While I agree with Kelber and others that Jesus is implying that Son of God is the more important title for understanding the presentation of Jesus in Mark, I would not go so far as to say that “Jesus rejects the Davidic sonship.”

<sup>107</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 492.



under the power of God's Spirit.<sup>108</sup> Jesus' emphasis is that what was stated by David about the Christ was not said by David's authority, but by the authority of God. It is then, the Spirit of God that testifies truly about the Christ and his relationship to David, not the scribes.

Second, David's statement pictures a scene where the κύριος speaks to David's lord (κυρίω μου). The use of the term κύριος in reference to two individuals presents initial confusion. The plain sense is that the first use of the term refers to God, while the second refers to David's lord, God's Messiah, and implicitly in Mark, Jesus. In David's statement it is God who tells David's lord to sit at the right hand of God, a place occupied only by God's Messiah. Moreover, it is to this Messiah that the promise of victory over enemies is given. Yet this victory is not won by the Messiah himself, but by God. It is the first κύριος who will place the enemies of the Messiah under his feet. In the context of Mark, these enemies may include both Jesus' human opponents and the demonic forces that have confronted him.<sup>109</sup> Moreover, this victory that is won by God is no military campaign, but is God's raising of Jesus from death.<sup>110</sup> As Jesus has stated that he will suffer and die, so he has also stated that he will rise. We have pointed out that in these statements Jesus implies God's actions in raising him from the dead. Thus the enemies who bring upon him suffering and death will be defeated at the victorious rising from the dead of God's Messiah.

Third, Jesus, through his question, "How then is he his son?" implies that since David calls the Christ "my lord" David views himself under the authority of the Christ, and therefore it is insufficient to speak of the Christ as the Son of David. Thus, although the crowd had earlier proclaimed the coming of the kingdom of David, it is a larger and more substantial kingdom which Jesus is executing. Having the authority whereby he sits at the right hand of God, the Christ is the one who

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 491.

<sup>109</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 136.

<sup>110</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 437; Schweizer, *Mark*, 257.

ushers in the kingdom of God. Therefore, the much more appropriate title for this Messiah in the Markan context is Son of God. From the standpoint of Mark's audience at this juncture in the narrative, Jesus remains above all Son of God. As Kingsbury notes, Mark combines the idea of Jesus as Messiah and Son of God in 1:1 and 14:61.<sup>111</sup> Therefore by implication, references to the Messiah in Mark would imply this association. Moreover, Marcus points out that the Septuagint version of Ps 110 also includes an address by God to the one he has exalted. God states, ἐκ γαστρὸς πρὸ ἑωσφόρου ἐξεγέννησά σε (Ps 109:3 LXX).<sup>112</sup> Thus, in thinking contextually about what Jesus has stated, the audience, drawing from both the context of Mark, and the context of David's prophetic words, understand quite clearly that Jesus is defining the Christ not in relation to David, but in relation to God. As Marcus states, "In the Septuagint, then, God himself is the Father of the one whom the psalmist calls "my Lord."<sup>113</sup>

Therefore in 12:35-37 Jesus reveals God as the one who inspired David to speak authoritatively about the Christ. Moreover, in Ps110:1 God tells David's lord to sit in the place of authority at God's right hand, until God himself brings victory for the Christ over his enemies. While Jesus does not explicitly deny that the Christ is the Son of David, he does imply that this title is not sufficient. Therefore, the Christ is better understood to be Son of God over Son of David. Mark, then, combines an implication of the context of the Psalm that Jesus quotes, and his own association of "Christ" with "Son of God" to communicate to his audience that Jesus is primarily Son of God, and thus that God is the Father of Jesus. God is presented in 12:35-37 as the κύριος, the Father of Jesus, who designates Jesus as κύριος, and vindicates the Messiah over his enemies.

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<sup>111</sup> Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark's Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 112

<sup>112</sup> Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 141.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid. Marcus also states, that the LXX reading of this verse may be closer to the original Hebrew than the MT.

### Mark 13:1-37

The so-called “Little Apocalypse” of Mark 13 contains the most extensive speech unit of Jesus in Mark’s narrative. The narrator introduces the pericope by telling the audience that as Jesus came out of the temple one of his disciples drew his attention to the splendour of the stones and buildings comprising the temple. The audience, knowing full well Jesus’ attitude toward the temple (cf. 11:17), may not be surprised by Jesus’ reaction to the disciple’s statement. For the characters, however, the seriousness of his prediction is implied in the response given by four of his disciples to his prediction about the fate of the temple. Their question, “Tell us, when will this be, and what will be the sign that all these things are about to be accomplished?” (13:4), opens the opportunity for Jesus to speak about the horrors still to come.<sup>114</sup> His long speech is filled with references concerning the destruction of the temple, persecutions that are to come, the cosmic phenomena that will occur, and the coming of the Son of Man. Yet the over-all implicit and explicit character behind the events prophesied by Jesus is God. In other words, Mark’s audience knows full well that God has been both an on-stage character within the narrative, and the off-stage character who stands behind the actions of Jesus. In Mark 13, then, the audience knows that God is implied as the off-stage actor behind the events of which Jesus speaks. Moreover, within the words that Jesus speaks about the events to come, God is explicitly presented as the one whose plan and purpose are certain, and who actively brings these events to pass in order to fulfil that plan and purpose. Thus, in this discussion of Mark 13:1-37 we will carefully point out God’s explicit and implicit role in the events of which Jesus speaks.

The first reference to God’s actions in these events comes in 13:7, where Jesus is speaking about the wars that will come. Jesus’ assuring words to his disciples rests in the reality that these must (δεῖ) take place. By using δεῖ here, Jesus forthrightly tells his followers that the wars, earthquakes and famines that will come are of divine necessity. Yet these signs are not the end itself, but are only the

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<sup>114</sup> On the possible allusion to Zech 14, where Yahweh is described as standing on the Mount of Olives, see N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 344-345.

“beginning of the birth pangs.”<sup>115</sup> Thus, Jesus is not ambiguous about the certainty of the end; it will come just as surely as the birth comes following the birth pangs. These occurrences are part of God’s plan, and thus these disciples do not need to fear.<sup>116</sup> Yet these events are only signs of the end, not the end itself, and are divinely necessary to execute God’s sovereignty and judgement over the world before the τέλος.<sup>117</sup>

Jesus’ speech takes a turn in v. 9 from the events that will take place on the world stage, to the events that are to come in the lives of his disciples. He warns them of the fate that awaits them, as they will be handed over to authorities, who will question them and beat them because they are followers of Jesus. Jesus, however, defines their personal calamity within the divine plan of proclaiming the gospel. Again Jesus uses δεῖ, indicating that the divine plan is that the gospel first be proclaimed to all the nations. Thus, in their being handed over, these disciples are participants in this plan of God.

Moreover, Jesus tells them that they themselves are not to be concerned with what they will say when brought to trial, rather, they are to say what is given to them. The use of both the divine passive δοθῆναι, and the explicit reference to the Holy Spirit as the source of what is to be said by these disciples, indicates that Jesus understands that these disciples will not be dependent on their own articulation in proclaiming the gospel while on trial, but will be speaking the very words given to them by God.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 458-459 draws attention to the Old Testament background of the imagery of birth pangs, stating, “In the OT the pangs of birth are a recurring image of the divine judgment, often in the context of God’s eschatological action (cf. Isa 13:8; 26:17; Mic 4:9f.; Hos 13:13; Jer 4:31; 6:24; 13:21; 22:23; 49:22; 50:43).”

<sup>116</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 738; George Beasley-Murray, *A Commentary on Mark Thirteen* (London: Macmillan & Co. LTD, 1957), 34.

<sup>117</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Mark Thirteen*, 34

<sup>118</sup> On the interpretation of δοθῆναι as a divine passive see Gundry, *Mark*, 739-740 and Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 11n2. The use of the strong adversative ἀλλά twice in v. 11 indicates the great distinction Jesus makes between the fear the disciples would have over what they would say when put on trial, and what the Holy Spirit would give them to say.

Both the certainty and tragedy of what Jesus says comes out further in his assertion that these disciples will be handed over (παράδωσουσιν), not by total strangers, but by members of their own families, even to the point of being put to death. Jesus, however, reassures them that God's plan will not fail. Though they will be handed over and hated because of Jesus' name, the one who endures to the end will be saved. By using the singular participle ὑπομείνας (13b), Mark pictures Jesus moving from speaking of events on the world stage (7-8), to what will happen to his followers (9-13a), to what is promised to each individual follower who remains faithful to his name to the end (13b). Jesus again uses a divine passive (σωθήσεται)<sup>119</sup>, and assures them that that one's fate rests in the God who will save those who endure. Thus, while their own families will betray these followers of Jesus, if they endure this persecution God will save them.<sup>120</sup>

Having warned the disciples of the persecution that will befall them, and having given them the assurance of God's purpose and protection through these trials, Jesus turns to speak of further calamities to take place outside the group of the twelve. The sign of these events to come will be what Jesus calls τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως (13:14). While space and intention preclude a discussion of the debate surrounding the meaning of this phrase, i.e. what exactly the desolating sacrilege is, we can point out that the majority of scholars have suggested that it refers to some sort of profanation of the temple, and probably reflects its use in

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<sup>119</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 741; Jeremias, *New Testament Theology*, 11n2.

<sup>120</sup> We have already witnessed Jesus in contention with his own family in 3: 31-35, and have been informed that it is those who do the will of God who are the true members of Jesus' family. Moreover, Jesus has stated that God is ὁ πατήρ ὁ ἐν τοῖς οὐρανοῖς of his followers (11:25). Thus, the audience of Mark's Gospel may well infer from Jesus' statement here in Mark 13 concerning the betrayal of family and the assurance of salvation that those who endure have a new family, one in which they are brothers and sisters of Jesus, and sons and daughters of their Father in heaven. Stephen Barton remarks, "At the personal level, the believer's identity is defined, no longer primarily in relation to his/her ties of natural kinship and household belonging (since here, the expectation is more one of resistance and conflict), but in terms of fictive or spiritual kinship to Jesus." (Stephen C. Barton, *Discipleship and Family Ties in Mark and Matthew* [SNTSMS 80; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994], 123).

Daniel (9:27; 11:31; 12:11).<sup>121</sup> Moreover, since the participle ἐστηκότα (set up) is in its masculine form, the reference may refer to some person, or more likely an image of a person.<sup>122</sup> This image would probably be that of the Roman Emperor.<sup>123</sup>

Jesus states that when this setting up is seen, those in Judea must flee to the mountains without gathering anything for protection. His instructions illustrate the severity of what is to take place, and this is further illustrated through the words of v. 19. He defines these sufferings as the worst the world has ever known, “from the beginning of the creation that God created.” In using this language, however, Jesus not only sets forth the seriousness of the sufferings to come, but also reminds the audience that God is the Creator of the creation that is experiencing these calamities. Although seemingly said in passing, within the context of Mark 13 this designation is significant for a number of reasons. First, it further highlights God’s sovereignty over the events that are to come. As we have stated, God is both explicitly and implicitly presented as the one behind the events Jesus speaks of in this chapter. These events, moreover, take place within the order which God created. Thus the sovereignty of God as Creator is explicitly set forth in v. 19. Second, if we accept that τὸ βδέλυγμα τῆς ἐρημώσεως is a reference to the image of the Roman Emperor that will be set up where it must not be (ὅπου οὐ δεῖ), in the temple, then we might propose that the reference to God as Creator implies the uniqueness of God, as emphasised by Jesus in 12:29. In the face of Roman enforcement of the emperor as a deity, the Markan audience is reminded that God is the Creator and the

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<sup>121</sup> For full discussions see Beasley-Murray, *Mark Thirteen*, 59-72; Desmond Ford, *The Abomination of Desolation in Biblical Eschatology* (Washington: University Press of America, 1979); David Wenham, *The Rediscovery of Jesus’ Eschatological Discourse* (Sheffield: JSOT, 1984). See also Timothy J. Geddert, *Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* (JSNTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989), 308n21, who argues that the text behind this reference is most likely Ezek 33:29 and that the abomination of the temple is done by the Jews and not the Romans.

<sup>122</sup> Anderson, *Mark*, 296.

<sup>123</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Mark Thirteen*, 72.

one true God.<sup>124</sup> Third, this presentation of God as Creator also gives Jesus the basis by which he can state that the Lord has cut short the days. Since God is the Creator of the creation, then God alone is the one who can cut short the days of calamity. Again God is explicitly presented as the one who is sovereign over the events of which Jesus speaks.

It is this reference to the Lord's cutting the days short that further defines God's role in these events. Jesus has stated that these sufferings are the worst that has ever been, indeed ever will be. Yet the Lord (κύριος; 13:20), clearly used here in reference to God, chooses to cut short these days of suffering because of the elect. Again, Jesus counters the reality of suffering with the promise of God's mercy and salvation for the faithful. It is for the sake of the elect of God, emphasised by the phrase οὗς ἐξελέξατο (13:20), that the Lord cuts short these days of suffering.<sup>125</sup> The mercy of God is further accentuated through the use of the negative phrase οὐκ ἂν ἐσώθη πᾶσα σὰρξ, translated "no one would be saved" (13:20), again using the passive verb ἐσώθη implying God as the agent of said salvation. If the Lord had not cut short these days of suffering then no one would be saved, seems to be what is implied in Jesus' statement. Jesus understands, then, the cutting short of the days of tremendous suffering as a signification of God's mercy and desire to save those of the elect.

Jesus then turns to warn against the coming of false messiahs who claim to be him, suggesting that they may possibly lead astray the elect of God. Jesus reminds his followers that he has told them everything they need to know in order to recognise the true Messiah. Then he spells out for them the signs of the coming of the true Messiah, the Son of Man. These signs are of cosmic proportion, and reflect both an Old Testament background and a Greco-Roman religious background.

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<sup>124</sup> On the Roman imperial cult see D. L. Jones, "Roman Imperial Cult," *ABD* 5: 806-809; idem., "Christianity and the Roman Cult," *ANRW* 2.23.2.

<sup>125</sup> Gundry (*Mark*, 743) notes, "(T)he strongly adversative ἀλλά in v. 20 emphasizes the shortening [of the days] for their [the elect] sake."



Moreover, the imagery used in Jesus' words also implies God's actions in the coming of the Son of Man.

Commentators have long noted that the celestial imagery used in v. 24-26 comes from imagery used in various passages in the Old Testament.<sup>126</sup> In using such imagery, Jesus defines the events surrounding the coming of the Son of Man in terms of God's judgement on the creation. Moreover, by using the passive voice in speaking about what is to happen to the sun, stars, and powers in heaven, Jesus may be implying God's actions in this celestial shake-up. This would coincide with the ancient Israelite belief that when God acts the celestial beings are disturbed.<sup>127</sup> This idea, however, is brought into further light if we understand this shake-up not only in terms of its Old Testament background, but also over against the Greco-Roman religions of the first century.

Bas van Iersel has suggested that the Markan Gentile audience may have understood the references to the sun and moon as implications of the Greco-Roman deities *Sol*, the sun god, and *Luna*, the moon goddess.<sup>128</sup> He also suggests that this interpretation is not weakened by the inclusion of stars in the passage, for stars, he argues, were also seen as personified beings.<sup>129</sup> Whether one accepts van Iersel's arguments or not, does not weaken the possibility that the original audience of Mark, residing in a Greco-Roman culture, may have understood a reference to these Roman gods in Jesus' statement. It is beyond question that the sun and moon were viewed as deities within the Greco-Roman religious context.<sup>130</sup> A Gentile audience, therefore, would at least be familiar with these gods, and possibly deduce from Jesus' words their downfall. Thus, in the darkening of the sun and moon, the falling of the stars, and the shaking of the powers of heaven, Mark's audience may understand

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<sup>126</sup> See for example Isa 13:10; 24:21; 34:4; Ezek 32:7-8; Amos 8:9; Hag 2:6, 21; Joel 2:10.

<sup>127</sup> Hurtado, *Mark*, 222.

<sup>128</sup> Bas M. F. van Iersel, "The Sun, Moon, and Stars of Mark 13,24-25 in a Greco-Roman Reading," *Bib* 77 (1996): 87.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 89.

<sup>130</sup> For a discussion of gods and religious beliefs and practices in the Greco-Roman world see B. Gladigow, "Roman Religion," *ABD* 5: 809-816.

Jesus as not only declaring God's actions in the coming of the Son of Man, but also his breaking of the powers of other gods. The stage is thus set for the coming of the Son of Man.<sup>131</sup>

This coming of the Son of Man is replete with more images normally related to God. This coming is not narrated in words used to describe the entrance of a common character within the narrative, but is described by Jesus with images reflecting God's entry into the world. The first image is that of the cloud. Mark has already used the term *νεφέλη* in 9:7, where he narrates the transfiguration story in which God speaks from a cloud to the three who have gone up the mountain with Jesus. Moreover, in the first direct speech of God in the narrative of the baptism of Jesus, God's words are preceded by the splitting of the heavens, perhaps implying the presence of clouds in the skies. But more important is the use of the image in the Old Testament. Gundry has indicated that clouds in the Old Testament are used as "divine mode(s) of transport."<sup>132</sup> Thus, the Son of Man's coming is via this divine mode of transport. The second image conveyed in Jesus' direct speech is power. For the Markan audience this echoes what Jesus stated in 9:1 when he claimed that God's rule would come "in power."<sup>133</sup> Moreover, the audience is fully aware of Jesus' divine power to do battle with the demons, heal the sick, and calm the forces of nature. Here, however, Jesus, identifying himself as the Son of Man, speaks of his future coming with great power (*δυνάμεως πολλῆς*). This power is the power of God given to the Son of Man, who sends out the angels of God to gather the elect of God. This power is linked with the divine glory (*δόξης*) with which the Son of Man will come. This glory echoes the Shekinah glory of God as witnessed in the Hebrew Bible. There, as C. Newman has argued, *כבוד יהוה* functions as a technical term

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<sup>131</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Mark Thirteen*, 87 suggests that the darkening of the sun and moon, and the falling of the stars, makes ready the black sky for the glorious coming of the Son of Man.

<sup>132</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 745. He cites Dan 7:13; Exod 34:5; Lev 16:2; Num 11:25, and Isa 19:1 as examples. See also Taylor, *Mark*, 518 and Beasley-Murray, *Mark Thirteen*, 89.

<sup>133</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 745.

“almost always associated with either movement or appearance terminology.”<sup>134</sup>

Moreover, related to the “appearance” of the כבוד יהוה, Newman argues that it “appears to many more people than just the sacred mediators.”<sup>135</sup> This understanding of the glory of the Lord has implications for understanding Jesus’ announcement of the coming of the Son of Man in Mark 13:26. First, similar to the appearance of the glory of the Lord to many people, the coming of the Son of Man with God’s glory is witnessed by others. This is a particularly interesting observation since the third person plural verb ὄψονταί has no clear antecedent, opening up the possibility that this coming will be seen by many. Moreover, the coming of the Son of Man in the clouds, after the cosmic shake up of the heavens, implies that this coming may be visible to many. The Son of Man’s appearance in the clouds is then the appearance of God’s great power and glory.

The coming of the Son of Man is the precursor to his sending of the angels to gather *his* (αὐτοῦ) elect. Previously, these elect were referred to as the elect of God. At this point, however, the elect are implied as the elect of the Son of Man. Thus the Son of Man, in acting to gather the elect of God, proves to be the Son of God, who has been given authority by God over the elect.<sup>136</sup> This authority is also manifested in the sending out of the angels.<sup>137</sup> We have already seen in Mark’s narrative the presence of angels who come and serve or minister to Jesus (1:13). Here in 13:27, however, these angels are sent out by him in order to gather the elect. Thus the Son of Man, truly being the Son of God, has divine authority over the angels of God and the elect of God.

The statement made by Jesus in v. 28, “From the fig tree learn the lesson” presents to the listeners of Mark an echo of previous events. Jesus’ reference to the

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<sup>134</sup> Carey C. Newman, *Paul’s Glory Christology: Tradition and Rhetoric* (Leiden: Brill, 1992), 24.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 21.

<sup>136</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 745.

<sup>137</sup> Wright, (*Jesus and the Victory of God*, 363) suggests that these angels are the followers of the Son of Man who will be sent out as messengers to the four corners of the earth to gather the elect. This seems highly unlikely given that Jesus is here speaking to his disciples who he does send out as his messengers; messengers he has never called angels before.

fig tree carries more with it than just an illustration from a fig tree that may be near by. The audience, on hearing Jesus mention “*the* fig tree” is thrown back into the narrative to reflect on the role of the fig tree in the events surrounding Jesus’ cleansing of the temple. This is supported by the use of the definite article here in 13:28, which is not used when the tree is first approached by Jesus in 11:13, but is used by Peter when he directs Jesus’ attention to the withered fig tree in 11: 21. The audience, then, hearing Jesus refer to “*the* fig tree” in 13:28 understands Jesus speaking about the tree from 11:13, 21.<sup>138</sup> Yet Jesus also seems to be speaking differently about the tree, using its natural cycle of fruit production as a lesson (παράβολήν). This lesson is that just as the tree produces leaves signifying the coming of summer, so when Jesus’ disciples see “these things” taking place, they will know that it or he is at the gates. In other words as the leaves of the tree are a sure sign of the nearness of the summer, so also the occurrence of the events of which Jesus speaks is a sure sign of the coming of the Son of Man. Thus, the leaves of the tree place this tree in contrast to the withered tree of 11:21.<sup>139</sup> What, however, does this mean for the disciples, and the Markan audience’s understanding of God?

To answer this question it is worth pointing out two observations. First, upon Peter’s exclamation that the tree Jesus cursed had withered, Jesus answers his concern by commanding him to have faith in God. In other words, although Jesus had cursed the tree, and the tree had withered, being unable to produce leaves and fruit, God has the power to give life back to the dead fig tree. Second, if we understand God’s implicit role in the eschatological events spoken of in Mark 13, and comprehend God’s role in other parables in Mark concerning growth, then we may understand the intention of the parable of the fig tree as presenting God as the one causing both the life and production of the fig tree, and as the active agent behind the signs and events to come. As C. Cousar has stated, “The eschatological

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<sup>138</sup> See Telford, *Barren Temple*, 213-218 for other reasons why the two fig trees are to be viewed together.

<sup>139</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 409. As Telford (*Barren Temple*, 216) states, “Here, then, Mark may perhaps be seen reflecting the two different sides of the fig-tree’s eschatological symbolism, that is, its withering as a sign of judgement, its blossoming as a sign of blessing (at least for Christians).”

perspective at work in Mark 13 corresponds to that of the parable of the seed growing secretly (4:26-29)."<sup>140</sup> He continues to build on this point by quoting Nils Dahl who stated,

There is a fixed plan and order for the eschatological chain of events, which can be illustrated by the process of growth. But what happens is not due to an historic development following an immanent necessity, but to the creative activity of God, who, according to his own plan, leads history toward its goal. God is the agent, and he alone lets his kingdom and the Messiah come the day he has fixed in his own plan and which he alone knows. To men the end comes suddenly, like a thief in the night; but it does not come unprepared, there is a series of events leading up to it, including wonders and catastrophes. The pictures taken from organic growth illustrate the divine order and the eschatological necessity of what is happening.<sup>141</sup>

Both Cousar's and Dahl's suggestions fit well with our understanding of the parable of the fig tree in 13:28-29. Just as the man who plants his seed can only wait for the mysterious occurrence of growth to take place, so the disciples and the Markan audience can only wait until God's appointed time for the end. Yet just as the fig tree surely produces leaves signifying the nearness of summer, so "these things" will be signs that the end itself is near. In response, the community, like Peter in 11:22, is to have faith in the God who produces the growth of the tree and who brings about the end.

Jesus, however, further speaks of God as the only one who knows when these events will take place. He even admits his own ignorance of the time when all this takes place. But in doing so he refers to himself as the Son, i.e. the Son of the Father who does know the day and the hour. While it is in proximity to his reference to the Son of Man that Jesus makes this designation of himself as the son, the audience is meant to hear Jesus as meaning the Son of God. This view is supported by several observations. First, we have already seen that though Jesus does speak of himself as the Son of Man in 13:26, it is implied that he is the Son of God since he has authority over the angels of God, and inherits the rights to gather to himself the elect of God.

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<sup>140</sup> Charles B. Cousar, "Eschatology and Mark's Theologia Crucis," *Int* 24 (1970): 327.

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid.*, 327-328; Nils A. Dahl, "The Parables of Growth," *ST* 5 (1952): 145.

Second, the crucial title used by the narrator and God in reference to Jesus is Son of God.<sup>142</sup> Third, since Jesus speaks here in 13:32 of the Father (πατήρ), and this is surely understood to be God, his reference to himself as the Son places himself in relationship to God as God's son.<sup>143</sup> The audience has heard even recently Jesus implying this relationship in the Parable of the vineyard (12:1-12).<sup>144</sup> Thus God is presented in Jesus' statement as the Father who is the only one to have knowledge of the day and hour when the events of which Jesus has spoken will take place.

Having spent a great deal of time working through Jesus' speech of Mark 13, it will benefit us at this point to summarise what has been gleaned from this passage regarding God. First, we have shown that the overall active person in the events of which Jesus prophesies is implied to be God. Second, Jesus also makes explicit reference to God's activity in these events. The catastrophes of war, earthquakes, and famines are divinely necessary, and illustrate God's sovereignty over the inhabited world. Moreover, it is divinely necessary that the gospel be proclaimed to all the nations. The disciples themselves are the ones who will proclaim this gospel before councils and governors. Yet the words they say are not their own words but are given to them by God through the agency of God's Spirit. Their trials and persecutions will be severe, but Jesus promises that God will save the one who endures to the end. God's salvation is for the elect of God, for whom God chooses to cut short the days of suffering. God's authority to cut these days short rests in his being the one God over creation. God's power as the one God over creation is further presented in the shaking of the heavens, the darkening of both the sun and moon, and the falling of the stars. God's power is further presented in the coming of the Son of Man, who, riding the mode of divine transport, comes in the power and glory of God to send out the angels of God to gather the elect of God, who become the inheritance of the Son of Man, signifying that he is truly the Son of God. God's power over the eschatological events to come is further illustrated by the fig tree that

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<sup>142</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 138-139.

<sup>143</sup> Beasley-Murray, *Mark Thirteen*, 107.

<sup>144</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 410.



was once cursed and withered, but has come to life to produce its leaves and fruit. God is presented as the one who gives the tree this life and who causes the production of its leaves. Thus God is the one who brings the signs and events of the end near. Yet, it is God alone who knows the day or hour when all this will occur. This is a knowledge to which the disciples, the angels, and even the Son of God are not privy. Thus, in the overall scheme of Mark 13 God is both explicitly and implicitly presented as the main character behind the events narrated there.

### Mark 14: 17-31

Chapter 14 takes the audience quickly along the path toward Jesus' impending death. Within vv. 1-11 there are three references to the death of Jesus (2, 8, 10). Moreover, the pericope narrates preparations for the Passover meal, the partaking of this meal, and the prediction of the betrayal and desertion of Jesus that give theological significance to Jesus' death. It is, then, 14:17-31 with which we are concerned in this discussion, and specifically how God is presented.<sup>145</sup>

As Jesus and his disciples are eating the Passover meal, Jesus startles his listeners, stating that one of them will betray him. Taken aback by this surprising revelation, the disciples each begin to ask, "Surely, not I?" The Markan audience, however, is not caught by surprise, for they have known for sometime who among the twelve would be the betrayer of Jesus. Judas has only recently been seen by the audience turning his back on Jesus by making his deal with the chief priests, who are very eager to oblige (14:10-11). In 14:19 Jesus tells the others, then, what Judas and the audience already know. Yet, more importantly, in this pericope the audience is once again confronted with the paradox of human and divine action working simultaneously in the death of Jesus.

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<sup>145</sup> While the location of Jesus and the disciples at the table (17-25) differs from their going out to the Mount of Olives (26-31), van Iersel (*Mark*, 429) has shown that the pericope of 17-31 forms a concentric structure centred on Jesus' saying about his blood being poured out for many, with his predictions of betrayal and desertion bracketing this saying.



We have already discussed Jesus' previous use of παραδίδομι and have stated that the passive use of the verb in Jesus' statements concerning his "handing over" to the authorities leaves open the possibility that both the actions of Judas and the actions of God are in view. Moreover, the audience understands that Jesus sees his impending death as a result of the evil actions of others, as well as the divine plan. This paradox is also in view here in the scene of 14:17-21. As soon as Jesus announces that one of his disciples will betray him, he announces, "For the Son of Man goes as it is written (γέγραπται) of him." Through this statement, the Markan audience is again reminded that the evils of men will not rule the day, but that the divine will is being accomplished in Jesus' going to his death. It is true that no specific text speaks of the death of the Son of Man. Jesus, however, may not be intending to reflect on a specific text. Rather, he may understand his divine destiny within the context of the Suffering Servant of Isaiah and, as we have seen, Mark's narrative itself may be based in the message of Isaiah's New Exodus.<sup>146</sup> Moreover, the audience is very familiar by this point in the narrative with God's purpose for Jesus' death. Jesus' death, then, will not take place primarily by the power of human betrayal and rule, but rather by the will and power of God. This understanding may be in view with Jesus' use of ὑπάγει. The verb translated "goes" suggests the idea of movement. In light of Mark's use of the metaphor "the way," Jesus may imply through his statement that "the Son of Man goes the way of God to his death."<sup>147</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> On this see especially Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus* and Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*. Two significant challenges to the idea that Jesus' understanding of his death was shaped by the suffering servant motif in Isaiah 53 appeared in 1959. Morna D. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant* (London: SPCK, 1959) and C. K. Barrett, "The Background of Mark 10:45," in *New Testament Essays: Studies in Memory of T.W. Manson*. (ed. A. J. B. Higgins; Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1959), 1-18, challenged this view basing their arguments primarily on the lack of clear linguist parallels. Against this, however, it is better, if we accept the thesis of Watts and Marcus that Isaiah serves as the framework of Mark's narrative, to hold the view that the suffering servant motif is conceptually present in Mark's narrative. Moreover, the statement by Jesus regarding his death as γέγραπται περὶ αὐτοῦ does not depend on any known Scripture or motif from the Old Testament to convey the idea that Mark's Jesus understood his death as God's will. For a recent collaborative treatment of the Suffering Servant by a number of scholars see W. H. Bellinger, Jr. and W. R. Farmer, eds. *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998).

<sup>147</sup> Schweizer, *Mark*, 299.

The text does not leave out the responsibility that will fall to humanity, and specifically Judas, for Jesus' suffering and death. But the larger understanding implied in Mark's narrative is that Jesus' death is of the divine will. God, therefore, is still presented as the agent behind Jesus' mission.

Jesus' divine mission is further coloured through the images of the Passover meal. This is particularly evident in Jesus' statement about the cup. In taking the cup and stating, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many", Jesus redefines the meaning of the Passover story and God's covenant with his people. The Markan audience views Jesus as the one whose blood inaugurates God's new covenant with them. Moreover, the saying reflects what Jesus has stated already concerning the giving of his life in 10:45. There he also states that he gives his life for many (πολλῶν). Here in 14:24 Jesus views his death as instituting a new covenant between God and humanity.<sup>148</sup> Thus, Jesus once again acts on the authority of God, this time as the mediator of God who institutes a new covenant between God and the many. The Markan audience understands, as they have previously, that this authority comes directly from God.

Having completed their meal together by singing the traditional Hallel Psalms, Jesus and his disciples go out to the Mount of Olives, where Jesus again makes a startling statement. This time he does not point out that one will betray him, but that all will desert him. The text asks the Markan audience to understand Jesus' knowledge of this desertion in light of his reflection on the prophet Zechariah. Jesus does not suggest that they will be deserters only of their own will, although this is certainly the case throughout the remainder of 14-15. Rather, the audience is once again presented with the paradoxical relationship between human actions and divine

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<sup>148</sup> Ibid., 304; Taylor, *Mark*, 546. It is most likely, as Metzger (*Textual Commentary*, 113) suggests that the inclusion of καινῆς in some mss can be attributed to a scribal addition. However, the actual inclusion of the word meaning *new* is not required for understanding that this covenant which Jesus is instituting is indeed new. On this see I. Howard Marshall, *Last Supper and Lord's Supper* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 92. Marshall suggests that the background to Jesus' saying in Mark 14:24 may be Exod. 24, where God establishes a covenant with Israel, instituted through a sacrifice (91). Given the clear intention of the Markan Jesus, that his blood is symbolic of his coming death, the new covenant established between God and humanity is instituted through his death as a sacrifice. Cf. Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and his Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan and Co., LTD., 1937), 125-139.

actions in the death of Jesus, this time focusing on the disciples' desertion of him.

The passage Jesus quotes is found in Zech 13:7. The voice which speaks in the context of Zechariah is God. Yet in Zech 13:7 (LXX) the verb is in the imperative form, commanding someone to strike the shepherd. Gundry rightly argues that the form is changed to the indicative to prevent the executioners of Jesus from blame, but he wrongly assumes that this form also keeps God from blame.<sup>149</sup> Jesus has not hidden the fact of God's actions in his impending death, he has spoken freely of it, at least to the disciples. For Gundry to assume that God is not implied as the subject of the verb in Mark 14:27 misses this point. Moreover, God's voice in the narrative via the Old Testament has already been heard in 1:3. So in Mark 14:27, God is suggested as the one who will "strike the shepherd", that is Jesus. Thus, the divine action in Jesus' death once again emerges in the Markan narrative.

This divine activity is not, however, limited to the death of Jesus. For immediately after Jesus announces the desertion of the sheep after the striking of the shepherd, he relates to his disciples his resurrection. Yet, his resurrection is not his own, but is by the power and action of God. By using the divine passive, ἐγερθῆναι, and the strong adversative ἀλλά, Jesus' statement presents to the disciples and the Markan audience both the certainty of God raising Jesus from the dead, and the distinction this resurrection has over his death. Thus Jesus, understanding fully God's plan in his coming death, also understands that God is not the God of the dead, but is the God of the living (12:27), who will be faithful in vindicating Jesus.

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<sup>149</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 845, 847. It is true that God is not the object of blame in the sense that God is guilty of Jesus' death. The Markan narrative, rather, pictures God's actions in Jesus' death as carrying out God's plan to establish a new covenant. Mark's intention in Jesus' quote from Zech 13:7 may be to connect Jesus' saying concerning his death, his blood, and the covenant, with the weakness of the disciples that is yet to be portrayed fully. In dealing with the change of the verb πατάσσω from the imperative form found in Zech 13:7 to the future indicative form found in Mark 14:27, Lindars (*New Testament Apologetics*) suggests that it is the detachment of the verse from its context that brought about the change in form. However, he also states that the subject of the imperative in Zech is the "sword of the Lord, and so is virtually God himself." Cf. C. E. B. Cranfield (*The Gospel According to Saint Mark* [Cambridge: University Press, 1959], 428) who comments, "In any case, there is no real difference of meaning; for to say that God commands the sword to smite is really the same as saying that God smites."

This discussion of 14:17-31 shows once again Mark's presentation of God. Once again Jesus speaks as the authoritative voice in the narrative, and through his words about his handing over, his death, and his resurrection he re-emphasises for the Markan audience God's activity in these events. The Markan audience, then, is again to understand Jesus' mission and death in light of God's will and purpose.

### Mark 14: 32-50

The presentation of God's actions in the Markan narrative continues with the dramatic scene from Gethsemane and the arrest of Jesus. The pericope of 14:32-50 swells with deep imagery and treachery, and the focus is on Jesus' anguish, his trust in God, the disciples' failure and desertion, and the "handing over" of Jesus to those who will judge him and kill him. Once again, however, Mark carefully intends that his audience infer from this scene that God is active in what takes place.

Throughout the Gospel Jesus has been presented as certain about the destiny that God has willed for him. Moreover, in the recent saying of Jesus concerning the bread and the cup, the audience understands further the Markan Jesus' state of mind concerning his death. It is shocking to the audience, then to see the anxiety of Jesus in the Gethsemane account. Never has Jesus demonstrated anguish or grievance over God's will for him to die.<sup>150</sup> Here in 14:33-34, however, Mark intends to show Jesus struggle with this divinely mandated death. Yet, Jesus is not narrated as turning from what God intends for him. Rather, he is presented as turning to God, relying on God's power and care in sustaining him to do God's will.

The prayer opens with Jesus' direct address to God calling God  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$  ὁ πατήρ. Much discussion has taken place regarding Jesus' use of the Aramaic term  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$ , most of which has focused on the historical questions surrounding Jesus' use of this term in reference to God. Our intention here is not to repeat these arguments, but to understand Jesus' use within the Gethsemane scene and within Mark's

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<sup>150</sup> Dowd, *Prayer*, 153.

narrative as a whole.<sup>151</sup> It has been the consensus of most scholars that Jesus adopted this phrase from everyday use in family life, and that the term carried special meaning particularly in relation to Jesus' use of it in reference to God.<sup>152</sup> In calling God *abba*, Jesus affirms his close relationship with God, and his trust in God's benevolence toward him.<sup>153</sup> Moreover, in narrating Jesus' direct speech to God, Mark mirrors to some extent his narration of God's direct speech in the baptism scene (1:11). The audience, reflecting on this scene, understands the relationship between God and Jesus in that at the baptism God designates Jesus as the "beloved Son" in whom God is pleased. Perhaps Mark intends the audience to understand that Jesus also reflects on this voice from heaven and now entrusts himself to the benevolence of God the Father. In doing so, then, Mark presents God in special relationship to Jesus, and as the God to whom Jesus turns for help.

Jesus' trust, however, is not limited to the benevolence of God. He seeks also to enlist the power of God to remove the cup of suffering from him. He affirms God's power to do anything (πάντα δυνατά σοι), a statement which has been spoken by Jesus earlier in relation to the disciples worry about who can enter into heaven if a rich man cannot (10:27). His statement in 14:36, however, is not a doctrinal affirmation absent of any personal concerns. No, Jesus' affirmation of God's power to do all things prefaces what is his real concern, a relief from the suffering that is fast approaching. This is requested forthrightly by Jesus to the God in whom Jesus trusts for both love and power. His affirmation that God can do all things clearly shows to the Markan audience that the reversal of the divine will narrated throughout the Gospel is entirely possible. God can take away the cup.<sup>154</sup> Therefore, God is presented through Jesus' statement as the one who can do all

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<sup>151</sup> For discussions surrounding the use of the term by Jesus see the secondary literature cited in Dowd, *Prayer*, 155n20.

<sup>152</sup> Joseph A. Grassi, "Abba, Father (Mark 14:36): Another Approach," *JAAR* 50 (1982): 449. See also Joachim Jeremias, *The Prayers of Jesus* (SBT 6; London: SCM Press, 1967), 57-65.

<sup>153</sup> Dowd, *Prayer*, 156.

<sup>154</sup> For comments regarding the possibility of God taking away the impending suffering of Jesus see C. K. Barrett, *Jesus and the Gospel Tradition* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1968), 46-49; Gundry, *Mark*, 855; Dowd, *Prayer*, 156.

things. But more importantly, God is presented as the only one who can deliver Jesus from the suffering and death that is upon him.<sup>155</sup>

This understanding is what leads Jesus to affirm his submission to the divine will. He has been characterised throughout the Gospel as submissive to God's will, and here even in the face of his suffering and death, though calling on God to intervene, Jesus submits himself to what God desires. Jesus lives out his own creed of discipleship, denying himself and taking up the cross. What is crucial for our understanding, however, is God's continued role in the mission and death of Jesus. It is clear from the text that Jesus believes that God can take away the cup of suffering. This, as Gundry states, "shows all the more that Jesus' crucifixion will be God's will."<sup>156</sup>

In contrast to Jesus' anguish, the disciples are presented in the narrative as unconcerned about Jesus' fate and their own faithfulness to him. This is emphasised by Mark's narration of Jesus finding them sleeping three times. Jesus has commanded them to "keep awake" (13:37; 14:34, 38), but they are weak in flesh. Jesus contrasts their weakness in flesh with the willingness of the Spirit. Clearly Mark intends Jesus to mean God's Spirit as opposed to the human spirit.<sup>157</sup> It is God's Spirit that is willing to give these disciples strength, just as it is God's Spirit that will give them the words to say when they face trial on account of Jesus' name (13:9-11). But in refusing to keep awake, watch, and pray, these disciples are in danger of entering into temptation, therefore, removing themselves from the Spirit who is willing to sustain them. As God is the only one to whom Jesus can turn

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<sup>155</sup> Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1984), 72 states, "The evangelist presents Jesus as an example of biblical faith, a tormented child of God in love with life and fearful of death, *without support except for the bedrock of God's fidelity.*" Italics added. Indeed the very reason for Jesus' trust in God which leads to his obedience to the divine will may be due to his understanding of God's power and will to raise him from the dead. This point will soon be taken up.

<sup>156</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 855.

<sup>157</sup> See Ps 51:12; Lane, *Mark*, 520; Eduard Schweizer, "πνεῦμα," *TDNT* 6:397; Werner H. Kelber, "The Hour of the Son of Man and the Temptation of the Disciples," in *The Passion in Mark*. (ed. W. H. Kelber; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 44. Kelber draws attention to what Jesus has already stated regarding the handing over of the disciples (13:9), and the significance of the empowerment by the Spirit who gives these disciples words to speak (13:11).



during this time of anguish, so the disciples, and indeed the Markan audience, can only turn to God in prayer, trusting in the willing Spirit of God to sustain them during times of anguish and temptation. Thus God is presented as the source of not only Jesus' hope in the face of suffering; God is also the one to whom the disciples and Mark's audience must turn during times of testing.

Mark further brings out this contrast between Jesus and the disciples in the arrest scene. Jesus is confident after his prayer that the will of God is for him to be handed over. Moreover, through his use of παραδίδωμι in 14:41, Jesus implies that God's will is being done, and that God is directly acting in accomplishing God's will by handing Jesus over. While Gundry argues against God being in view here in the use of the verb, it seems that the text is asking the audience once again to hold in tension both the activity of God in the handing over of Jesus and the activity of Judas in the betrayal.<sup>158</sup> Mark has already narrated Jesus as stating, "the Son of Man goes as it is written of him" (14:21) within the context of his prophecy that one of the twelve would betray him. Moreover, Jesus' statement in 14:49 sets the arrest of Jesus within the plan of God as a fulfilment of scripture. While the characters in the narrative see the human involvement in the arrest of Jesus, Jesus assures those arresting him that all is done in order to fulfil scripture. Thus, God is the one who ultimately hands Jesus over to the authorities.

Again, God is presented in Mark's narrative as the one who is active in bringing about Jesus' suffering and death. It is God who wills for Jesus to die, and it is God who hands Jesus over, though through the voluntary participation of humans. Moreover, Jesus again understands this arrest as a fulfilment of scripture, i.e. what has been ordained by God. Yet this does not prevent Jesus from calling upon God to take away this suffering. God is the all-powerful one, and the loving *abba* of Jesus in whom Jesus trusts. God is also the only one to whom Jesus can turn for rescue. Thus God is the only one to whom the disciples can turn in prayer for strength to face

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<sup>158</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 875-876. In support of the use of παραδίδωμι to imply God's actions, along with the actions of Judas, in 14:41 see Hooker, *Mark*, 350; Susan R. Garret, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 100-104.



temptation. God's Spirit is willing to sustain them, if they are willing to be sustained. Thus we see once again God's activity in Mark's narrative.

### Mark 14: 53-65

The trial of Jesus in Mark follows directly on the arrest of Jesus. Scholars have debated the historical issues surrounding this trial, and particularly how the accusation of blasphemy against Jesus is to be understood. While the historical questions are intriguing and important, it is certainly beyond the scope of this work to discuss, much less answer these concerns.<sup>159</sup> Again, our primary concern is with Mark's narrative and the presentation of God through the narrative.

After Jesus is arrested he is brought before the chief priests, the elders, and the scribes, where witnesses are gathered to testify against him. Mark tells the audience, however, that many gave false testimony (ἐψευδομαρτύρουν; 14:56). Others also gave false testimony saying, "We heard him say, 'I will destroy this temple that is made with hands, and in three days I will build another, not made with hands'" (14:58). The Markan audience knows, even without Mark's comments about this testimony being false, that indeed the Markan Jesus has never stated this. He did prophesy that the temple would be destroyed, but the presence of those who are now giving witness against Jesus is not narrated in the pericope where Jesus speaks this prophecy. Yet in an ironic twist, these false testimonies are narrated by Mark in order to present the reality he has emphasised throughout the Gospel narrative, that Jesus acts on the authority of God.<sup>160</sup> This is brought out through the wording of these false witnesses, who state that he said, "I will build another (temple), not made with human hands." Here is a clear instance in Mark's narrative where the audience is intended to fill a narrative gap. It must be assumed by the audience that Jesus is portrayed here by the false witnesses as speaking not only about the destruction of

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<sup>159</sup> For a recent and helpful discussion of the historical issues surrounding the trial scene in Mark see Darrell L. Bock, *Blasphemy and Exaltation in Judaism and the Final Examination of Jesus* (WUNT 106; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998).

<sup>160</sup> On the irony of 14:57-58 see Juel, *Messiah and Temple*, 55-58.

the temple, but also referring to it as a temple made with human hands. If he is going to build one not made by human hands, then the previous temple that is mentioned in the statement must be one made with human hands. The audience is clearly aware that Jesus has acted and spoken against the temple. Thus, through the ironic false testimony of these witnesses, Mark may be presenting the truth that Jesus acts with the authority of God in the building of a new temple, which is not made with human hands. The new temple, whatever it may imply, will be built by Jesus, on the authority and power of God.<sup>161</sup> The audience, then, accepting the truth of this ironic statement, infers from it that God is once again the one from whom Jesus has authority.

It is this authority that is then questioned by the high priest when he asks Jesus, “Are you the Messiah (ὁ χριστὸς), the Son of the Blessed One (εὐλογητοῦ)?” Jesus then responds in the affirmative, and adds to this answer by using words alluding to Dan 7:13 and Ps 110:1. This leads to the accusation that Jesus has spoken blasphemy. What, however, is implied for the audience’s understanding of Jesus, and ultimately God, in this exchange between Jesus and the high priest?

To begin, we need to determine what is implied in the question asked by the high priest. The audience has already heard the terms *χριστὸς* and *υἱός* used in proximity to each other, and in relation to Jesus (cf. 1:1). Here, however, Jesus is not asked specifically if he is the Son of God, although the phrasing *ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ εὐλογητοῦ* is probably here spoken by the high priest in an effort to avoid the use of the divine name, thus implying the same idea as Son of God.<sup>162</sup> The question that arises, however, hinges on how one understands the wording of the high priest’s question. In forming the question as he does, does the high priest intend to equate

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<sup>161</sup> See Gundry (*Mark*, 899-900) who cites various references from Jewish literature regarding the Messiah’s and God’s portrayals as builders of the temple.

<sup>162</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 909-910; Lane, *Mark*, 535n132; Taylor, *Mark*, 567; Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language* (trans. D. Kay. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902), 200.

the terms “Messiah” and “Son of God”? In other words, is the Markan audience to understand that “Messiah” also means “Son of God”? J. Marcus has suggested that this is not the meaning of the text. He argues that the priest is not asking if Jesus is the “Messiah” and therefore the “Son of God”, but that he is asking, “Are you the Messiah, who is the Son of God?”<sup>163</sup> Marcus’ point is that the high priest was seeking to determine if Jesus was a Messiah, and if so was he the Messiah who is the Son of God, as opposed to other messiahs. Marcus, in my opinion is right to suggest this, in that not only does it help the audience to understand why Jesus is accused of blasphemy, because he assumes participation in God’s lordship, but that it also relates to Jesus’ recent warning about false messiahs given in 13:21-22. Jesus’ affirmation, then, is not that he is just any messiah, but that he is the Messiah the Son of God. Thus, against Juel, who argues that the idea of Jesus as Messiah in Mark is implied as Davidic Messiah<sup>164</sup>, Marcus rightly demonstrates that Mark intends to show the high priest inquiring as to whether Jesus is Messiah-Son-of-God.<sup>165</sup>

To this question asked by the high priest, Jesus responds, ἐγὼ εἰμι, sealing his fate, which is the will of God. Yet Jesus is not satisfied simply to answer in the affirmative. Rather, he seeks to go further in his explanation of who he is, and uses once more the self-designation he has used throughout the narrative. The use of Son of Man here, however, is reflective of its use in Dan 7:13, which is alluded to in Jesus’ statement in 14:62. Moreover, it is the title Son of God that is of primary importance for the Markan narrative, and not Son of Man. Therefore, Jesus’ statement about the coming of the Son of Man must be understood in light of his authority as Son of God, which is once again pictured in language that presents God’s activity and presence.

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<sup>163</sup> Joel Marcus, “Mark 14:61: ‘Are you the Messiah-Son-of-God?’” *NovT* 31 (1989): 125-141. Marcus points out that this is exactly the point of Mark 12:35-37. Although Jesus is the Davidic Messiah, the more correct term in describing Jesus, the true Messiah, in Mark is Son of God (Marcus, 135-137).

<sup>164</sup> Juel, *Messiah and Temple*.

<sup>165</sup> Marcus, “Mark 14:61,” 138.

Jesus tells the high priest that he “will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power (τῆς δυνάμεως), and coming with the clouds of heaven.” By using once again images related to God, specifically where τῆς δυνάμεως is certainly an indirect reference to God, Jesus intends to show not only the authority invested in him by God, at whose right hand Jesus will be seated, but the vindication that will be given to the Son of Man by that Power in heaven.<sup>166</sup> Jesus’ coming with the clouds again brings to the surface the idea of God’s presence and power in his coming victory. And this affirmation of himself as Son of God, and the one who will be seated at the right hand of God is what brings onto Jesus the accusation of blasphemy.

God, therefore, is presented in the trial scene of Mark’s narrative as the one who gives authority to Jesus, and as the one in whom Jesus will have victory. Moreover, Jesus is once again presented as the Son of God, therefore communicating to the audience the close relationship between Jesus and God.

### Mark 15: 33-39

After standing before the Sanhedrin and then Pilate, Jesus is taken out and crucified. The scene with which the audience is confronted represents not only the noble death of the Messiah, Son of God, and the mocking of those who seem to gloat in their supposed victory over this rebel, but is also a scene which pictures the activity and presentation of God. This is specifically important within the few verses of 33-39.

The first suggestion of divine activity within the scene is the cosmic event that takes place shortly before Jesus’ death. Mark specifically tells his audience the time of day in order to highlight this event. It is noon, the time of day when the sun would be most visible in the sky. Yet Mark tells his audience that darkness came over the whole (ὅλην) land and lasted for three hours. This occurrence produces in

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<sup>166</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 886-887.

the minds of the audience what Jesus stated earlier about the darkening of the sun after the great suffering (13:23). But more importantly, it further substantiates for them God's involvement in the Markan narrative. It is God who has ripped open the heavens and spoken at Jesus' baptism and it is God who manipulates creation to serve God's purposes. Thus, clearly Mark's intention is to show God's reaction to the death of God's Son. This reaction, carrying with it Old Testament imagery representative of divine judgement, is a sign that God's judgement on the world is beginning.<sup>167</sup>

The statement made by Jesus in Mark's crucifixion narrative is one of the most enigmatic statements in the entire Gospel. It has presented problems for scholars, problems that revolve around how one is to understand this cry of abandonment in light of the Gospel's insistence on the inseparability of Jesus and God. How does the Markan audience understand the narration of Jesus' cry from the cross? More importantly, what does this mean for the Gospel's theology? To answer these questions, we will need first to layout the two most popular views toward Jesus' words, and then determine how a Markan audience might understand this cry in light of the over all narrative.<sup>168</sup>

In Mark 15:34, the author is careful both to transliterate and translate the words of abandonment spoken by Jesus. The result of his actions has presented problems for the church since that time, as evidenced by scribal changes in some of the Markan textual witnesses.<sup>169</sup> The words of Jesus in Mark come from Ps 22:1, a Psalm of lament, where the Psalmist shows both distress at God's abandonment and trust in God's providence. Thus, one approach to the interpretation of Jesus' cry from the cross is that he intended to imply the whole Psalm in his quotation of v.1, and in doing so he intended to voice the victorious cries within that Psalm. It may be

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<sup>167</sup> See Zeph 1:15; Joel 2:2; 3:4; Amos 8:9-10. Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1035.

<sup>168</sup> Space prevents us from discussing all of the options that scholars have proposed. For a detailed discussion of the Aramaic background of Jesus' cry, and an analysis of the various scholarly interpretations, on which I have relied, see Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, 264-275. See also Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1043-1058.

<sup>169</sup> See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 120.

true that the first verse of a Psalm could be used as the title of that particular Psalm, but Moo argues that this was common mostly in liturgical settings.<sup>170</sup> We may add, that it seems unlikely that Mark would use this particular portion of Psalm 22 to imply a victorious cry by Jesus, if indeed he wanted to imply the whole Psalm. It seems that if this were his purpose, he would have been better served by quoting one of the verses that represents the trust in God's providence and victory.

We are left, then, with accepting the text as it stands. The text asks the audience to look Jesus fully in the face and see the anguish of abandonment he is experiencing. His call to God has moved from addressing God as *Abba*, a term describing a close relationship, to addressing God as *Eloi*, a more common term used to address God.<sup>171</sup> Thus the two prayers are set over against one another, highlighting the sense of estrangement Jesus undergoes while on the cross. While it may be surprising to the audience that God has abandoned Jesus at his time of need, when one takes a look back at Mark's narrative, one is startled by the foreshadowing of this event in the previous narrative. For example, we have shown that through the use of *παράδωμι*, the story has implied God's activity in the handing over of Jesus. This is particularly evident when the audience remembers both that Jesus emphasised that he would be "handed over" into the hands of humans (9:31; 10:33), and the actual narration of this handing over at the arrest of Jesus (14:41). Thus, in the previous narrative Mark may have alluded to what seems to be a surprise for the Markan audience at the crucifixion. In other words, if God is behind the "handing over" of Jesus to humans, then God in a sense abandons the Son into the hands of these humans.<sup>172</sup> Indeed, this maybe one of the reasons why it is the centurion, and not God, who calls Jesus God's Son in the crucifixion scene, a role which God has exclusively held, outside the narrator and the evil spirits. Regardless whether or not Mark has prepared the audience for this abandonment, however, the cry of Jesus and

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<sup>170</sup> Moo, *The Old Testament in the Gospel Passion Narratives*, 272.

<sup>171</sup> Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1046-1047, notes that "Mark calls our attention to this contrast between the two prayers and makes it more poignant by reporting the address in each prayer in Jesus' own tongue."

<sup>172</sup> E. P. Gould, *Mark*. ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1896), 294.



the translation of that cry by the narrator, presents a separation between God and Jesus that has been foreign to the narrative to this point. The audience, although knowing the death of Jesus is God's will, and the abandonment of Jesus by God must somehow fall into that will, is left to ponder God's turning away from the Son at the Son's most desperate hour. Yet, once again, as in the prayer of Jesus in the garden, the audience is to understand that Jesus' call to God is a realisation that it is God who is the only one to whom Jesus can turn at this time of need. While the bystanders think that Jesus calls out to Elijah for help<sup>173</sup>, Mark's intention through the cry of Jesus from the cross is to show Jesus as not only abandoned by God, but to show that God is the only one in whom Jesus can find hope. Thus, although the cry is one of abandonment, the cry also invokes Jesus' belief in God as his only hope.

It is while the bystanders wait and see whether Elijah will come and save Jesus that the audience hears, "Jesus gave a loud cry and breathed out his last breath" (15:37). Yet, Mark takes the audience from the foot of the cross to the inner sanctuary of the temple, where the veil (καταπέτασμα) of the temple is torn (ἔσχίσθη) into two pieces (15:38). Despite the abandonment of Jesus by God, Mark continues to narrate God as active in the story. Using the same verb used to describe the ripping open of the heavens at Jesus' baptism, a divine passive, the narrative calls the audience to understand that *God* acted to rip apart the curtain which veiled the Holy of Holies in the temple.<sup>174</sup> Again, God will not be shut out from the narrative world of Mark, and even in the death of God's Son, in whom power and authority have been invested, God remains active.<sup>175</sup> The view that God

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<sup>173</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 573 comments, "Later Jewish sources illumine the popular belief that Elijah will come in times of critical need to protect the innocent and rescue the righteous."

<sup>174</sup> Whether the veil was the outer or inner veil does not change the fact that God acted in response to Jesus' death by ripping the veil. Moreover, as Malbon (*Narrative Space*, 126) has suggested, the event itself designates the loss of the temple. Seen in conjunction with Jesus' death, the narrative serves to assure the audience that the loss of the temple is not devastating. Thus, the tearing of either curtain would signify the end of the temple, and the exclusion of the non-Jewish. For a list of scholars who argue for either the inner or the outer veil of the temple see Howard M. Jackson, "The Death of Jesus in Mark and the Miracle from the Cross," *NTS* 33 (1987): 16-37.

<sup>175</sup> On the link between the baptismal scene and the death scene in Mark see Jackson, "The Death of Jesus in Mark"; Stephen Motyer, "The Rending of the Veil: A Markan Pentecost?" *NTS* 33 (1987):



acted in the tearing of the veil is further supported when the audience understands that the narrative may allude to the Spirit of God in Jesus' last breath as the force which tore the veil. This has been argued by H. M. Jackson<sup>176</sup>, who points out that Mark's use of the verb ἐσχίσθη here and in 1:10, calls the audience's attention to the fact that the Spirit descended upon Jesus at the Baptism, and is breathed out by him in his death. Thus, as the audience has seen that the Spirit of God is upon Jesus, and indeed has empowered him, so the audience understands that through his last breath, Jesus breathes out the powerful Spirit of God that tears the temple veil. In the tearing of the veil, then, God responds to the death of Jesus by nullifying the sanctuary of the temple.<sup>177</sup> Thus from a theological perspective, God will not allow the Son to die in vain, but in the Son's death God acts to judge the temple establishment, and to open up the most sacred of places. Moreover, though the cry of Jesus from the cross may bring a shadow of hopelessness on Mark's audience, the tearing of the veil quickly renews their hope in the providence of God over these events.

Hope in God's plan for Jesus is also kept alive in the confession by the centurion. We have already alluded to the idea that Mark may place this confession on the lips of the soldier because God, the normal voice who affirms Jesus as Son of God, has abandoned Jesus. Yet the significance of the confession runs deeper. The centurion is not only the first human to confess Jesus as God's Son, he is the first Gentile to make such a confession.<sup>178</sup> He has witnessed the last breath of Jesus, and,

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155-157; Malbon, *Narrative Space*, 187n93. See also Harry Chronis, "The Torn Veil: Cultus and Christology in Mark 15:37-39," *JBL* 101 (1982): 971-114, who sees in the tearing of the veil a theophany. Cf. Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zurich/ Neukirchen: Benzinger/ Neukirchener, 1978), 2:324.

<sup>176</sup> Jackson, "The Death of Jesus in Mark."

<sup>177</sup> Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1102

<sup>178</sup> Many debates about this confession centre on the anarthrous υἱὸς θεοῦ. It is argued that since the centurion is not narrated as voicing Son of God with the definite article, then the confession must be something less than what has previously been said of Jesus as Son of God. Thus, the centurion's confession must be that Jesus is *a* son of God, and not the Son of God. (See the recent treatment of this by E. S. Johnson, Jr. "Mark 15,39 and the So-Called Confession of the Roman Centurion," *Bib* 81 (2000): 406-413). However, within the narrative world of Mark, any affirmation of Jesus as God's Son would raise in the minds of Mark's audience what they have accepted about Jesus from the

as the narrative may suggest, he may witness the ripping of the temple veil. Thus, as the tearing of the veil introduces God's opening of the place exclusive to priests, so the confession of Jesus as God's Son by a Gentile signals that the gospel of God preached by Jesus at the beginning of his ministry is now finding fulfilment among the Gentiles.

The presentation of God within Mark's death scene of Jesus shows that God remains the active force behind and within the narrative of Mark. God, the power over creation, executes his judgement by bringing darkness upon the land during the most lighted time of day. Further, even though God's Son is given over to abandonment and death, God remains sovereign over the events narrated in 15:33-39. It is God who is at the same time presented as the one who abandons Jesus over to death, and the only one to whom Jesus can turn for hope. Moreover, through the ripping of the veil God is shown as the one who brings judgement on the temple because of the death of Jesus, and the one who opens the most sacred of places for all to enter. Yet, most importantly God is once again confirmed as the Father of Jesus through the voice of a Gentile Roman soldier, who, seeing the power of God, confesses the truth about the dying man.

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beginning of the narrative, namely that Jesus is Son of God. Commenting on this discussion Brown states, "There is no likelihood that Mark's audience would make a distinction between what their creedal statement (Jesus is the Son of God) meant ca. 70 and what the high priest and the centurion meant when they used "Son of God" in a story situated in 30/33." See Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 2:1146-1152 for a detailed discussion of these arguments.

Doanld Juel (*A Master of Surprise: Mark Interpreted* [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994], 74n7) and Robert M. Fowler (*Let the Reader Understand Reader-Response Criticism and the Gospel of Mark*. [Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991], 206-208) comment that the centurion's confession is somewhat ambiguous and may possibly be understood as a taunt, much like the mocking of Jesus by the other enemies at the cross. Juel states that Mark is using irony, in that the centurion speaks the truth, but in a sarcastic voice. Against this it is better to side with Gundry, *Mark*, 974 and van Iersel, *Mark*, 480 who point out that the use of "truly" (ἀληθῶς) would indicate that both the centurion and Mark intend the confession to be authentic.

**Mark 16:1-8<sup>179</sup>**

After the burial of Jesus, the narrative pictures for the audience a scene in which three women are walking to the tomb in order to anoint Jesus' body. The audience is prepared for the women's reaction by the narration of their concern over who will move the stone. By telling his audience this, Mark raises in their minds not only shadings of the women's shock and fear to come, but their own reflection upon the story Mark has narrated, and particularly the words spoken by Jesus concerning his resurrection. At several points in the story Jesus stresses that his death is not the end. The grave will not hold him, and God will be faithful to raise him from the dead. The women are shown here as either forgetting what Jesus had stated, or unbelieving of what he stated. But Mark is quick to narrate exactly what they do see when they reach the tomb. The stone has already been moved. The audience is left to ponder the answer to the women's question concerning who will move the stone, for the text does not give an answer. The narrative does ensure that the listeners do not suppose that just anyone could have removed the stone, for it plainly states that the stone was "exceedingly great" (μέγας σφόδρα). Therefore, someone of great power has moved the stone, but whom?

Mark is not interested in telling the audience who moved the stone, though he is quite keen to describe to them the events that take place after the women go into the tomb. On entering the tomb these women see a young man sitting, dressed in a white robe. The identification of this figure has prompted various views, but certainly the narrative intends that we see him as some sort of heavenly being.<sup>180</sup> As a heavenly being sent from God, he announces the good news to these women about

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<sup>179</sup> It is probably not necessary, and certainly beyond the scope of this project, to defend the position of accepting 16:8 as the closure to the Markan text. The material regarding the Gospel's ending is vast, and most scholars agree that the best textual evidence supports the shorter ending. However, for a case arguing that Mark 16:9-20 was part of the original text of Mark see, W. R. Farmer, *The Last Twelve Verses of Mark* (SNTSMS; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1974); Cf. J. N. Birdsall's review of Farmer in *JTS* 26 (1975): 151-160.

<sup>180</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 501-504 presents the novel idea that this young man is the narrator, who also is the demoniac in 5:1-20, and the naked young man in 14:51-52. Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure: Mark 16:7, 8," *JBL* 108 (1989): 293, states that Mark may intend this reference to the young man as ambiguous, reflecting an allusion to the young man of 14:51, and an angel.

what God has done. He states clearly that the Jesus they seek “has been raised.” Moreover, he reiterates and defines the meaning of this with the phrases that follow: οὐκ ἔστιν ὧδε Ἴδε ὁ τόπος ὅπου ἐθηκᾶν αὐτόν. Again Mark employs the use of the passive (ἡγέρθη) indicating that it is God who raised Jesus from the dead.<sup>181</sup> What is crucial about this statement is that the verb follows directly the designation of Jesus as the one who was crucified (τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον).<sup>182</sup> Mark may intend more by the use of this term than just the designation of the correct Jesus. First, by hearing these two verbs in juxtaposition, the audience infers that the cruelty of the cross and the evil of humans in the crucifixion of Jesus have been replaced by the faithfulness and power of God. The audience remembers well the anguish in the Garden and the cry from the cross. The announcement of God’s having raised Jesus from the dead assures them once again of God’s faithfulness to the Son. Second, the proximity of τὸν ἐσταυρωμένον and ἡγέρθη in juxtaposition to one another may be intended to place the actions of humans against Jesus in the background and bring forward the actions of God in the resurrection. The perfect passive form of the participle ἐσταυρωμένον suggests that the crucifixion event is something in the past, which has continuing results.<sup>183</sup> The aorist tense of ἡγέρθη, however, conveys an event that is in the recent past.<sup>184</sup> Thus, the resurrection does not necessarily negate the event of the crucifixion, but it does place that event in the background, at least at this point in the narrative. As E. Broadhead states, “In the Gospel of Mark the raising of Jesus represents the act of God in response to the torture and injustice which ended the life of Jesus.”<sup>185</sup> The trial, the mocking, and the death are all placed

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<sup>181</sup> Hooker, *Mark*, 385.

<sup>182</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 992 sees in the young man’s statement of 16:7 an antithetical chiasmic pattern: (a) “you are seeking Jesus the Nazarene,” (b) “the crucified [one],” (b’) “he has been raised,” and (a’) “he is not here”.

<sup>183</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 134.

<sup>184</sup> Taylor, *Mark*, 607; Gundry, *Mark*, 1001.

<sup>185</sup> Edwin K. Broadhead, *Naming Jesus: Titular Christology in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 175; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 156.

in the past, and hope in the resurrection is now at the fore. Thus, the actions of God in the Markan narrative are also brought to the fore in the mind of the audience.

Mark has continued to narrate God's activity in his story of Jesus. In the brief pericope of 16:1-8, the audience is presented once again with the power of God and God's faithfulness to the Son. It may indeed be God that is implied as the one who moved the stone. Certainly it is God who is presented as the one who raised Jesus from the dead. Moreover, in narrating the events in this way, Mark intends to place the crucifixion event and the evil of humanity in the past, and present to his audience the power and faithfulness of God to raise Jesus from the dead.

Yet this faithfulness must extend beyond the narrative world of Mark. If, as we have stated, the Gospel ends at 16:8, where the women are afraid to say anything to anyone, one must ask "Why?" This, of course is an historical question that, barring further textual evidence, may never be answered. Yet can we not assume that because of the very existence of Mark's Gospel, the story indeed continues beyond the textual ending of Mark, despite the failure of the women to do what is told of them? Jesus is after all portrayed as the truth speaker and prophet within Mark's Gospel, and he has told them that he will meet them in Galilee. Would it not be unusual then, for Jesus to fail to meet his disciples in Galilee? It must be assumed then, or rather in literary terms, the audience must fill the gap, that Jesus indeed does meet his disciples in Galilee. The women at the tomb and the male disciples before them are viewed as failures, at least within the narrative of Mark. But the continuation of the story in the lives of the Markan audience assures the listeners of Mark that failure is not the end. Rather, despite any failure on the part of humans to do God's will the gospel of both Jesus and God will prevail, because of the faithfulness of God. Thus, regardless of the initial failure of the women to relay the message the young man commanded them to tell, the message of Jesus' resurrection indeed was told.<sup>186</sup> In raising Jesus by his power, God is portrayed as the God of the living, indeed the *living* God, who continues to be faithful despite the failure of

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<sup>186</sup> Lincoln, *Promise and Failure*, 292 notes that the promise was fulfilled and the audience knows this to be the case. What the audience does not know, however, is how it was fulfilled.

humans. The Markan audience is fully aware of the story of Jesus' resurrection, having believed in this resurrection themselves. Thus, in knowing that God is the God of living, these believers reflect on what Mark's narrative has stated concerning this God.

In doing so, however, the Markan audience may indeed be pushed beyond the mere beginning of Mark's Gospel, to the past, which Mark invokes in the initial sentences of his narrative. Thus, not only does the story of Mark reach into the past, where God promises to bring eschatological victory, it also reaches into the present, and the future, of the Markan audience, in that God's victory in the raising of Jesus must be viewed as a continuing story in the lives of the audience.

A further *theo*-logical understanding of Mark's narration of the resurrection of Jesus follows from this. Scholars have long noticed that Jesus does not himself appear in the narrative of Mark after the resurrection. He does not meet his disciples, speak with them, eat with them, or give them the commission to go and make disciples. He is, instead silent. Would Mark's Christological task have not been helped by an appearance of the risen Jesus? Would it not have wrapped up the story in a much cleaner way to have the women see Jesus, and the disciples meet Jesus? Would not the Markan audience be better served in their faith to see, through the text, the risen body of Jesus? Mark, however, intends his audience to understand the resurrection of Jesus as an act of God, in which they are to have faith. More importantly, in his non-narration of an appearance by Jesus, Mark may be intending that his audience have faith in the God who has raised Jesus. Like Jesus, who answers Peter's concern over the withered fig tree by stating, "Have faith in God," Mark is asking his audience to have faith in God. The women are viewed within the narrative as not having that faith. Mark calls on his audience to do not as they do, but to have faith in the God of the living.

### Conclusion

The lengthy and detailed discussion in chapters 2 and 3 has drawn our



attention to the presentation of God within Mark's Gospel. We have approached this Gospel as a holistic narrative, and have sought specifically in this discussion to highlight where God is presented within that narrative. We have seen that the narrator uses both showing and telling techniques in the presentation of God. The modes for presenting God are various. In this way the narrator serves as the reliable voice throughout. Moreover, we have seen that the Gospel's main visible character, Jesus, serves as the reliable character who speaks about God, and speaks and acts for God. In doing so, Jesus becomes the authoritative voice for God, the spokesman whom the narrator uses to shape the presentation of God. Yet, the presentation of God shows that God is indeed the *main* character behind the narrative. All that takes place in the narrative follows from this portrayal of God. God is the first voice in the narrative, by way of Mark's use of scripture in 1:2-3, and the last to act in the narrative in the raising of Jesus. God is also the authoritative voice in the narrative, who announces the sending of the messenger, who pronounces Jesus as the Son of God, empowers him with the Spirit of God, and invests authority in the Son of God, in order that the will of God be carried out. This will is seen in Jesus' battle against the demonic, his healing of the diseased, his teaching of the divine will, and in his death, resurrection and future vindication.

The narrative, therefore, carefully holds in tension the separateness of God and Jesus with the unity between the Father and the Son. Thus the focus of our attention will soon turn to address this presentation of Jesus in light of the presentation of God in the narrative. It is clear that early Christians understood Jesus in relation to God, whatever this implies. Therefore the investigation of Mark's Christology as an aspect of the Gospel's theology has both grounding in the history of early Christianity, as well as grounding in the narrative itself.<sup>187</sup>

Further, the issue of discipleship in Mark will be investigated as an aspect of

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<sup>187</sup> Dahl recognizes this in "The Neglected Factor in New Testament Theology," in *Jesus the Christ: The Historical Origins of Christological Doctrine* (ed. D. H. Juel; Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991). Cf. Dahl's articles, "Trinitarian Baptismal Creeds and New Testament Theology," (165-186), and "Sources of Christological Language," (113-136) in the same volume. See also J. D. G. Dunn, "Christology as an Aspect of Theology," in *The Christ and the Spirit*. Vol. 1: Christology (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998), 377-387. From a systematic theological position see Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (San Francisco: Harper & Row Publishers, 1982).



Mark's presentation of God. While the more common assumption of Markan scholarship is to view discipleship as an aspect of Christology, I will argue that the narrative seems to imply that discipleship is more directly related to the presentation of God than what has been detected up to this point. As Donahue argues, doing the will of God seems to be the defining trait of true disciples.<sup>188</sup> These disciples, including those outside the twelve, are to be the new people of God, who have repented and believed in the gospel of God, and who are empowered by God to proclaim that gospel. They are to live in forgiving community with one another, and will receive the eschatological reward for their faithfulness. They are the elect of God who will be saved by God if they endure. Therefore, it may be time to re-examine what the narrative defines as discipleship, and to understand it within a *theo*-logical framework.

Given, therefore, this presentation of God we may suggest, as we will soon establish in the remainder of this thesis, that these other themes within the narrative are better viewed within the overall *theo*-logical scheme of the narrative.

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<sup>188</sup> Donahue, "Neglected Factor," 582-587.

# Chapter Four

## “This is my Beloved Son”

### Mark’s Christology as an aspect of Mark’s Theology

#### Introduction

In the previous two chapters I discussed at length where and how God is presented in the Markan narrative. There I sought to lay the groundwork for the remainder of this thesis, understanding how other themes in Mark’s Gospel are better viewed as aspects of the overall *theological* purpose of the narrative. In this chapter, our attention turns to Mark’s Christology.<sup>1</sup> In the discussion that will follow in this chapter we will be seeking to understand how the audience is to understand Mark’s Christology in light of the presentation of God in the Gospel.

In an article appearing in *New Testament Studies* in 1986, Leander Keck called for a renewal of New Testament Christology stating, “the time is at hand to take up again what was set aside – an explicitly theological approach to NT Christology, one which will be informed by the history of ideas but which will deliberately pursue Christology as a theological discipline.”<sup>2</sup> Keck also defined “Christology” as “a comprehensive term for the statement of the identity and

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<sup>1</sup> Significant works on Mark’s Christology include, but are not exclusive to, the following: William Wrede, *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963 [ET: *The Messianic Secret*. Trans., J. C. G. Greig (London: James Clarke, 1971); Johannes Schreiber, “Die Christologie des Markusevangeliums. Beobachtungen zur Theologie und Komposition des zweiten Evangeliums,” *ZTK* 58 (1961): 154-183; Leander E. Keck, “Mark 3:7-12 and Mark’s Christology,” *JBL* 84 (1965): 341-358; Vernon K. Robbins, “The Christology of Mark” (Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1970); Theodore J. Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); Eduard Lohse, “Apokalyptik und Christologie,” *ZNW* 62 (1971): 48-67; Norman Perrin, “The Christology of Mark: A Study in Methodology,” *JR* 51 (1971): 173-187 (Reprinted in Norman Perrin, *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 104-121; Otto Betz, “The Concept of the So-Called ‘Divine Man’ in Mark’s Christology,” in *Studies in New Testament and Early Christian Literature: Essays in honour of Allen Wikgren* (ed. D. Aune; Leiden: Brill, 1972); Etienne Trocmé, “Is there a Markan Christology?” in *Christ and Spirit in the New Testament: In Honour of C.F.D. Moule* (eds. B. Lindars & S. Smalley; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 3-13; Robert Tannehill, “The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology,” *Semeia* 16 (1979): 57-95; Philip G. Davis, “‘Truly this Man was the Son of God’: The Christological Focus of the Markan Redaction” (Ph.D. diss., McMaster University, 1979); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *The Christology of Mark’s Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983); M. Eugene Boring, *Truly Human/Truly Divine: Christological Language and the Gospel Form* (St. Louis: CBP Press, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Leander E Keck, “Toward the Renewal of New Testament Christology,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 362.

significance of Jesus.”<sup>3</sup> Moreover, he argued that New Testament Christology must be exactly that, “Christology as it appears, or is implied, in the NT.”<sup>4</sup> Along these same lines, Schubert M. Ogden argues that the prior question to “Who is Jesus?” is “Who is God?”<sup>5</sup> Ogden seems to suggest in his discussion that the central point of Christology is to answer this prior question. In my analysis of Mark’s Christology, I am following somewhat Keck’s suggestions he so pointedly articulates concerning the growing debate over methodological approaches to the study of Christology, as well as Ogden’s arguments regarding the theological question Christology answers. On the other hand, I am also seeking to address the christological question theology answers in terms of Mark’s presentation of Jesus as an aspect of the presentation of God.

My argument, then, is that the narrative of Mark communicates to its audience a Christology that extends from its theology. In other words, the character Jesus has significance within the narrative as an aspect or extension of the character God in Mark’s Gospel, and not primarily from figures existent in the world outside the narrative.<sup>6</sup>

Given the vast amount of material that has been produced by scholarship on the topic, the mention of conducting a study of Mark’s Christology raises questions and concerns. Thus, to manage such a discussion limitations must be clearly set

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 371, italics added.

<sup>5</sup> Schubert M. Ogden, *The Point of Christology* (New York: Harper & Row, 1982), 25. See also Wilhelm Thüsing, “Christology and theology: the Christologically determined theology of the New Testament,” in *A New Christology* (ed. K. Rahner & W. Thüsing; New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 85-159.

<sup>6</sup> This is not to suggest that Jesus does not resemble, or indeed reflect certain figures, whether they are those from the Old Testament, or those within the contemporary frame of reference of the first century audience. I am particularly thinking here of the discussion within Markan studies, and New Testament Christology in general regarding the *theios aner*. This term has, I think, some validity in the discussion, but it certainly is not the primary category in which the Markan Jesus is to be understood. For a analysis and critique of this term and its use as a category for understanding Jesus see Barry Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Markan Miracle Traditions: A Critique of the Theios Aner Concept as an Interpretative Background of the Miracle Traditions used by Mark* (WUNT 2; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991), and the brief discussion in Kingsbury, *Christology*, 33-45.

forth that will allow a coherent discussion on the matter. The first limitation is obvious. This discussion will be limited to the topic of Mark's Christology. We are not here concerned to discover the words, events, or settings of the historical Jesus' teachings and actions. While historical questions are important, and indeed Mark's presentation of Jesus certainly helps to answer the historical questions surrounding Jesus, we shall take Mark's narrative on its own, apart from the history behind the text, and apart from the presentation of Jesus in the other Gospels, both canonical and non-canonical. My interest is in proposing an original hearing of the *text of Mark*, and how the *Markan Jesus* is presented through that text. This leads to a second limitation. As was laid out in the beginning chapter of this thesis, we are more concerned here with Mark as a literary whole, rather than the redaction history of the text. The stories and episodes involving Jesus must be understood within the larger framework of Mark's narrative. This is not to deny that whoever first penned this narrative utilised tradition. Rather, I am assuming that this person had freedom over this tradition, and freedom to craft the story for a theological purpose.<sup>7</sup> Thus, as in the previous chapter, the focus here is on Mark's Gospel as a final narrative text, and the term Mark again refers to the text and not a presumed human author. Finally, though the scholarly discussion on Mark's Christology is vast, we will only be able to dialogue with scholars where it is pertinent to the discussion.

The intention of this chapter, then, is to demonstrate that the Christology of Mark's Gospel is better understood through a literary analysis of Jesus' relationship to God as presented in Mark's Gospel. In arguing this, we will seek to show that Jesus is the one who is sent by God, authenticated by God, submissive to God, and vindicated and exalted by God. In doing so, it is hoped that the picture of Jesus that is deduced from the narrative will serve to highlight that Mark intends to present

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<sup>7</sup> This does not presume that the sole purpose for Mark's Gospel having been written is theological. Certainly, we must admit that there is a pastoral dimension to the narrative, in that the story may have been addressed to Christians facing persecution, though not necessarily an audience residing in a particular geographical location. On this see Richard Bauckham, ed. *The Gospels for All Christians: Rethinking the Gospel Audiences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998). Yet, Mark seems to weave together its theological and pastoral concerns in a way in which the writing of the Gospel may have been prompted by the pastoral concern, but is driven by the theological purpose. Thus theology addresses the situation of the Markan audience.

Jesus primarily in relation to God. First we will discuss the narrative presentation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel. Second we will discuss the presentation of Jesus as an aspect of the presentation of God as we have outlined in the previous chapter. Finally we will summarise our arguments.

### **Narrative Analysis of Mark's Presentation of Jesus**

"If we are to understand how the author of Mark wished to present Jesus Christ to his readers, we must apprehend the statements and events recorded there as parts of a unified narrative"<sup>8</sup>

With this statement from his classic article, R. Tannehill steered the discussion of Mark's Christology, at least for some, away from the historical questions that seemed to lead to further questions rather than answers, to understanding Mark's christological task within the narrative itself. Moreover, Tannehill argued that investigating Mark's Christology as a narrative art "provides a deeper understanding of the meaning and function of Mark's presentation of Jesus Christ."<sup>9</sup> Taking our cue, then, from Tannehill and others who have followed<sup>10</sup>, we intend in this discussion to lay out a narrative analysis of Mark's presentation of Jesus. In doing so, we will first discuss the narrator's art of *telling* the audience who Jesus is through the use of titles for Jesus. These titles will be discussed under the categories of those which identify Jesus in relation to God, and those which seem to be ambiguous in their description of Jesus in Mark's Gospel. We will also seek to find coherence and unity in Mark's use of these titles.

Following this, the discussion will turn to the narrator's art of *showing* the audience who Jesus is in relation to who God is in the narrative. Here we will turn to discuss the presentation of Jesus as the one sent from God, as well as Jesus' actions

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<sup>8</sup> Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," 60.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid., 89.

<sup>10</sup> See also David Rhoads and Donald Michie, *Mark as Story: An Introduction to the Narrative of a Gospel* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982) esp. 103-116; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 47-155.

for God (miracles), Jesus' proclamation of God (teaching and preaching), Jesus' death as an act of/for God, and Jesus' vindication and exaltation as an act of God. This analysis, together with our discussion of the titles used to describe Jesus will help establish the foundation whereby we can propose to view the presentation of Jesus in light of the presentation of God.

### **The Presentation of Jesus through Christological Titles**

The titles used to describe Jesus have been the focus of many scholarly debates.<sup>11</sup> These debates have mostly centred on Jesus' understanding of the titles he uses to describe himself, and the early Christians' concept of the titles used to name Jesus. Yet this has not been sufficient for a number of reasons. First, the various titles used of Jesus present problems in finding a consistent understanding of which title predominates. Indeed, it may be that the early Church used these various titles because there was no clear adequate title which fully defined who Jesus was. Thus the use of these various titles in the New Testament, including Mark's Gospel may not be intended to present a comprehensive portrait of Jesus.<sup>12</sup> Second, the focus on the titles has sought to discover their meanings outside the narrative contexts of the Gospels. These narratives are thus nullified as these titles are studied to the neglect of the overall narrative presentations of Jesus. The best solution in dealing with these titles, then, is to look first at the literary context in which titles are used and how they function in that context. Moreover, we must understand that the titles themselves do not determine the meaning and significance of Jesus. Rather, the presentation of Jesus in the narrative gives particular meaning and significance to the

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<sup>11</sup> Significant works on the titles used for Jesus include: Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (London: SCM Press, 1959); Ferdinand Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology: Their History in Early Christianity* (London: Lutterworth, 1969); Robert H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (London: Lutterworth, 1965). For a very recent approach that utilises a narratological reading see Edwin K. Broadhead, *Naming Jesus: Titular Christology in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 175; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999).

<sup>12</sup> For a critique of the use of titles as the main vehicle for understanding Jesus see Horst R. Balz, *Mehodische Probleme der neutestamentlichen Christologie* (WMANT 25; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1967).



titles.<sup>13</sup> While many would argue that the significance of the titles is to be found in their use within Judaism, whether Hellenistic or Palestinian, or within the Greco-Roman culture of the first century, it seems better that Jesus' activity in the Markan narrative gives significance and meaning to these titles. This is not to suggest that the historical background of these titles must not inform discussion of them. Rather, it is to suggest that the titles are better understood within the narrative presentation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

The following discussion, then, will investigate these titles within the context of Mark's Gospel. I will seek to describe the function each title has in the presentation of Jesus in the narrative, and particularly how these titles function to relate the presentation of Jesus to the presentation of God.

### *υἱὸς θεοῦ*

The title Son of God is considered by a number of Markan scholars to be the most important christological title in the narrative.<sup>14</sup> It occurs at crucial times in the narrative: The opening verse of the Gospel (1:1)<sup>15</sup>, the crucifixion scene in which the Roman Centurion confesses Jesus as God's Son (15:39), the baptism (1:11) and transfiguration (9:7) scenes in which God calls Jesus "my Son," the trial scene where the high priest asks Jesus if he is "the Son of the Blessed One" (14:61), and in 3:11 and 5:7, where Jesus is recognised as Son of God by the unclean spirits. Each of these references serves to inform the audience of Jesus' true identity and significance. Moreover, this title, more than any of the others, most likely connects Jesus with God in a way that is superior to all other characters in the narrative. Yet,

<sup>13</sup> Michael L. Cook, *Christology as Narrative Quest* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1997), 76; Marinus de Jonge, *God's Final Envoy: Early Christology and Jesus' Own View of his Mission* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 97.

<sup>14</sup> See for example Philip G. Davis, "Mark's Christological Paradox," *JSNT* 35 (1989), 3-18; *idem*, "Truly this Man was the Son of God"; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 47-155; Broadhead, *Naming Jesus*, 116-123; M. Eugene Boring, "Markan Christology: God-Language for Jesus?" *NTS* 45 (1999): 452; Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology."

<sup>15</sup> On the textual problem regarding the originality of υἱοῦ θεοῦ see the discussion in chapter 2.

the use of υἱὸς θεοῦ should not be taken as the only means by which the narrative suggests that Jesus is Son of God. Mark also is concerned to present Jesus as Son of God through his narrative art. Before these are discussed, however, it will be important to show once again the importance of the title as found in the baptismal scene of 1:9-11.

As we have argued throughout the previous chapters, the baptismal scene serves as the source from which the Markan audience draws their understanding of Jesus' authority which he executes in action and word throughout the narrative. It stands as the point at which divine authority, power, and mission are given to Jesus by God. Moreover, the baptism also serves to set forth God's point of view in relation to who Jesus is.<sup>16</sup> While the narrator is the first to designate Jesus as Son of God (1:1), it is God who serves as the authoritative voice, in both the baptismal (1:9-11) and transfiguration scenes (9:7), who gives the audience valuable and true information about the significance and identity of Jesus. The omniscient narrator and the unclean spirits only know this identity, until the centurion, seeing the significance of Jesus in his death, confesses Jesus as Son of God. Other characters in the story are unaware of this identity as Son of God. Yet the audience is privy to this information and to the scene in which this is made most clear, the baptism. Thus, in every occurrence of the title within the Gospel, the audience is surely reminded of the significance this title has in the baptism, and more importantly who called Jesus by this title.

Having now identified the divine voice's confirmation of Jesus as the Son of God in the baptism and transfiguration as that which establishes the source of the audience's understanding of this title as it relates to Jesus, it will now be important to discuss what was earlier alluded to. There are other passages in which the title Son of God is not explicit, but the identity of Jesus as the Son of God is implied through the narrative.

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<sup>16</sup> On this see Kingsbury, *Christology*, 60-68.

First in 13:32 Jesus states concerning “the days” and “the hour” that no one knows the time, not even the Son, but only the Father. The question that arises from the audience may concern whether Jesus means to imply Son of Man or Son of God when he only says “Son.” Having understood the use of Son of God three times previous to these words of Jesus, however, the Markan audience would comprehend this mention of the Son and the Father to mean Jesus and God.<sup>17</sup> Thus the mention of the Father in context with Son implies not the Son of Man title, but the Son of God title. Although Jesus suggests his own lack of knowledge of the time of the end, for only the Father (God) knows this, his use of υἱός and πατήρ does suggest his knowledge of the relationship he has to God. This is, however, only one place where these are in correlation.

Traditionally Mark 8:38 has been treated as one of the Son of Man sayings in Mark’s Gospel, and the saying will be treated as such in the later discussion of this much debated title. However, the wording of Jesus compels us to ponder whether the Gospel audience is to reflect on the narrative in order to connect Jesus with God who is the Father of the Son of Man. Clearly the narrative persuades its audience to accept that Jesus speaks of himself in this context, and equally clearly to accept that his use of “Father” refers to God.<sup>18</sup> Thus, although Jesus designates himself as the Son of Man, calling God “his Father” implies that the relationship between God and

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<sup>17</sup> Against this, Barnabas Lindars (*Jesus Son of Man A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels* [London: SPCK, 1983], 112) argues that “Son” in 13:32 probably implies Son of Man. He bases this reading on the inclusion of both “Father” and “Son” in 8:38, where Jesus speaks of the “Son of Man”. However, it seems more probable that the use of the term “Father” in reference to God in 13:32, particularly in connection to the use of “Son” in the absolute sense, would intend that the audience understand Jesus to imply Son of God. As I shall argue below, the use of Son in 8:38 may also imply the Father /Son relationship.

<sup>18</sup> There is, of course, the very familiar argument of H. E. Tödt, in which he argues that Jesus did not equate himself with the transcendent Son of Man, but that the early church attributed this to Jesus based upon his use of the title in reference to his earthly authority (see Heinz Tödt, *The Son of Man in the Synoptic Tradition* [Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1965]). Thus, the historical Jesus had in view a figure different from himself, who would be vindicated and exalted. In answer to this, I would remind the reader that I am taking Mark’s narrative on its own apart from the historical Jesus. It seems that the narrative is clear to present the Son of Man as one figure who is given authority by God, who is killed because of these claims, and who is/will be vindicated and exalted by God. Clearly the Markan Jesus, particularly here in 8:38, where he uses the designation Son of Man in relation to the “Father” (God), uses the term to refer to himself.

Jesus is that of Father and Son. The question that arises concerns the reasons why the Markan Jesus used Son of Man here and not Son of God. If he intended to imply himself to be Son of God, why did he not just use that title in reference to himself? The answer lies in the scope of Mark's narrative. At no time in the narrative does Jesus announce that he is Son of God. Rather, he implies this relationship, and the narrative shows this to be the case. Moreover, having heard the voice in the baptismal scene, the audience should know that the mention of God as *πατήρ* in any context where Jesus is called Son implies that Jesus is the Son of God. Further, the idea of God's eschatological victory in both 13:32 and 8:38, and the mention of the Son, imply the Son's participation in this victory.

The Parable of Mark 12:1-12<sup>19</sup>, as we demonstrated in the previous discussion, also presents this relationship between Jesus and God. The beloved son of the parable (*υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν*), as we argued in the previous discussion is most certainly an allusion to Jesus.<sup>20</sup> Moreover the owner of the vineyard is implied to be God, and this clearly serves to present Jesus as the Son of God via this parable. The owner as a last resort sends the son before he himself comes and destroys the tenants. Up to this point this owner has sent only the servants in order to collect what is rightfully his. The sending of the son then is viewed within the parable as significantly different than the sending of the servants. The son of the owner serves as the surrogate for the owner, thus the owner says, "Surely they will respect my beloved son." By associating Jesus with the son of the parable, the Markan audience understands Jesus as more than a prophet, who is sent as the final and authoritative representative of God. Although Jesus stands in the tradition of the prophets sent by God, and is sent to carry out the same basic task as the prophets, with some

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<sup>19</sup> The title given to this parable has traditionally been the Parable of the Wicked Tenants or Husbandmen. However, as Brad H. Young (*Jesus the Jewish Theologian* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995], 215-224), has suggested, this title is a misrepresentation of the point of the parable. While the guilt and destruction of the tenants is evident, the primary point of the parable is to show Jesus as the true son of the vineyard owner, who, though being killed by the tenants, is vindicated. Therefore, possibly a more appropriate title should be "The Parable of the Only Son" (Young, 217).

<sup>20</sup> On the debates surrounding whether Jesus is to be identified as the son of the parable see the discussion in the previous chapter.

significant difference, he is also significantly different from these prophets in that he is designated as "Son." Not only does this present Jesus as being different from the prophets in his mission, he is different as well is his relationship to God. In addition, after the death of the "beloved son," there is no one else who can come to destroy the tenants but the father/owner, who vindicates the deaths of the servants, and particularly the son, by destroying these tenants and giving the vineyard to others. Thus the parable to this point demonstrates the significant, indeed supreme role the son plays in the purposes of the father. He is the final envoy who stands in unique relationship to the father.

One other incident in the narrative can be brought to bear upon this discussion. As discussed in the previous chapter, the scene in the Garden brings home to the audience the significance of Jesus' relationship to God. There Jesus prays, "*Abba*," an intimate term to describe God. The audience's recognition of Jesus' use of this term of intimacy here in the garden prayer, causes them to reflect on the relationship between Jesus and God, and particularly on the way God addressed Jesus in the baptismal scene, "You are my beloved Son" (1:11). In the baptismal scene Jesus is called the "beloved Son" by God and is given his mission. In the Garden, Jesus accepts this mission and refers back to the intimate relationship he has with God via his use of *abba*. Again, the idea in both scenes is that Jesus and God are in unique relationship, and in the Garden prayer Jesus again expresses his trust in the fidelity of God. Also, what the audience understands from Mark's story is that the prerogative of calling Jesus ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός rests with God alone, and the prerogative of calling God *abba* is found only with Jesus. Those characters, then, who call Jesus Son of God throughout the narrative, primarily the demons who have supernatural knowledge of Jesus, do so after God has so designated him as such. We may even state that the centurion's confession is brought about by his response to the death of Jesus. He is given revelation of whom Jesus truly is. Moreover, although Jesus implies God to be the Father of his followers (3:35), and calls God "your Father in heaven" when speaking to the

disciples, the prerogative of calling God *abba* is only given to Jesus.<sup>21</sup> Thus, through the framework title Son of God, and the acceptance of this title by Jesus, Mark presents Jesus in filial relationship to God the Father. This relationship is significantly different from other servants of God. Indeed, it is this title that enrages the High Priest, forcing him to call for Jesus' death (14:61-64).<sup>22</sup>

The view that Mark uses the title Son of God as an important designation for Jesus is seldom challenged. What is normally at the heart of the debate concerning this title is its meaning. How does Mark intend his audience to understand Jesus as the Son of God? The idea of divine sonship finds background in the rulers of the ancient Near East.<sup>23</sup> Moreover, in the Old Testament certain beings and persons are called son/s of God, e.g. angels (Gen 6:2), Israel (Hos 11:1), and the righteous ones (Wis 2:13,16,18). This is particularly true of the divinely appointed King of Israel (2 Sam 7:14; Ps 2:7; 89:26-37).<sup>24</sup> In this sense then, the King stands as God's anointed ruler of God's people. Thus the background to this title implies that its use here in Mark is to identify the Son of God as the divinely appointed ruler.

Though this image may be present in Mark's Gospel in the sense that Jesus has come to announce the kingdom of God, and indeed is crucified as "King of the Jews," the use by Mark of the title is developed on its own terms within the Markan narrative. Philip Davis has made an appealing observation concerning the use of Son of God in the Markan narrative. He points out that the title is never used in reference to what Jesus does. Rather, the term is used to describe who Jesus is. In using the term in this way, Mark, as Davis states, does not describe the act of salvation Jesus accomplishes, but "to account for it by identifying him as the divine person Mark

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<sup>21</sup> Scott McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 55 comments that Jesus' use of *abba* is similar to its use within Judaism. Certainly, McKnight is correct on this point. However, within the story framework of Mark's narrative, only Jesus is presented in intimate relationship to God; he alone uses this address for God.

<sup>22</sup> Davis, "Mark's Christological Paradox," 13-14.

<sup>23</sup> See. C. J. Gadd, *Ideas of Divine Rule in the Ancient East* (London: Oxford University Press, 1948), 45-50; H. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948), 299-301.

<sup>24</sup> Fuller, *Foundations of New Testament Christology*, 31; Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament*, 273-275.



believed him to be and proclaimed him to be, above all in 15:39.”<sup>25</sup> We may add to Davis’ observation, by suggesting that “Son of God” serves as the primary title used to link Jesus with God. It is crucial that the only characters other than Jesus to know Jesus as the Son of God are the demons. It is not until the ultimate revelation of Jesus’ significance in the narrative, his death on the cross, that another character speaks of Jesus as being the Son of God. Thus in narrating Jesus as Son of God, Mark presents Jesus in close relationship to God, and defines Jesus’ significance as Son of God.

Therefore, as Broadhead has pointed out, Son of God functions as the framework title to the Gospel, and the actions of Jesus within the narrative define what Son of God means for the Markan narrative. Jesus is called Son of God from the beginning, and the progression of the story seeks to define how he is Son of God.<sup>26</sup> He is Son of God by virtue of God’s proclaiming him as such and commissioning him to carry out God’s purposes on earth, mainly his death. Thus, while the historical background of the use of the title may shed light on its use in the narrative, it is probably better to understand the actions and words of Jesus in the narrative as defining for the audience what “Son of God” means.<sup>27</sup>

Moreover, the significance of God calling Jesus “my son” and Jesus alone calling on God as *abba*, suggests that there is more to this term than just royal Christology. The intimacy with which the relationship between Jesus and God is presented via these designations clearly points to a relationship that goes beyond that of Jesus as King and God as the one who anoints, although this is certainly present. Moreover, the lack of any birth narrative, as well as Jesus’ remarks concerning his true family (3:31-35) seems to imply that Jesus’ identity and being is to be found in God alone. Thus the title Son of God is the important title through which the

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<sup>25</sup> Davis, “Mark’s Christological Paradox, 14. See also Boring, “Markan Christology: God-Language for Jesus?”, 452-453.

<sup>26</sup> Broadhead, *Naming Jesus*, 123.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. M. Eugene Boring, “The Christology of Mark: Hermeneutical Issues for Systematic Theology,” *Semeia* 30 (1984), 131.

narrative communicates to the audience that Jesus' identity and significance is in his relationship with God.

### *χριστός*

Ferdinand Hahn describes the title *χριστός* as being "deeply rooted in the OT and thus far is to be regarded as genuinely Biblical."<sup>28</sup> This background presents evidence that the idea of the Messiah of Israel carries royal imagery. Though this image is not foreign to the Markan narrative as evident from the words of the mockers in 15:32, the narrative suggests a deeper theological meaning for the title.

The term itself occurs eight times in Mark's Gospel. The use of it in 13:21 can be dismissed for our purposes here, since Jesus here is using the term in reference to false messiahs, and not in reference to himself, except that it sets him as being the true Christ. Its place in 1:34 in some manuscripts is highly improbable.<sup>29</sup> Thus we are left to investigate the use of *χριστός* in 1:1, 8:29, 9:41, 12:35, 14:61, and 15:32.

While there are many debates about the originality of the term Son of God in 1:1, the inclusion of the term Christ here is undisputed. The use of the term here is by the narrator who sets forth the identity of the one about whom his story will be concerned. The association of this term with the framework term Son of God, which is spoken by the reliable narrator of the story, sets forth for the audience Jesus' true identity, and the significance of what it means for Jesus to be the Christ.<sup>30</sup> Moreover, Peter, one of the close followers of Jesus, confesses that Jesus is the Christ (8:29). In proximity to this confession, Jesus also implies himself to be Son of God when he

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<sup>28</sup> Hahn, *The Titles of Jesus in Christology*, 136.

<sup>29</sup> See Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament* (New York: United Bible Societies, 1971), 75.

<sup>30</sup> Boring ("The Christology of Mark," 129-130) states, "Mark himself gives us an important key to the content of 'Christ' by defining the title in terms of another important christological title which had already played a role in his own situation: Son of God."

tells his listeners that the Son of Man will “come in the glory of his Father with the holy angels” (8:38).<sup>31</sup> This statement immediately precedes the transfiguration scene where Jesus is called Son by the voice from heaven. The use of the term *χριστός* by the High Priest in his question put to Jesus also brings together the two terms Christ and Son of God. In both 8:29 and 14:61 Jesus does not reject the title Christ as a description of himself. While in both he seeks to define what Messiah means, he does not reject, and in the case of 14:62 heartily accepts (*ἐγὼ εἰμι*), this title. What, however, can its use in 15:32 tell the audience as to what the title may imply?

First, it should be noted that Mark uses the mockery of those who pass by the crucified Jesus in ironic style to convey what the Markan audience already knows about Jesus.<sup>32</sup> These opponents taunt Jesus, calling him to come down and prove himself to be the Christ, the King of Israel. Their mocking, however, is blinded by their incomprehension of Jesus’ divine mandate as God’s Messiah. They challenge Jesus to save himself as he saved others, not knowing that it is by his not saving himself that Jesus dies as Messiah and saves others. This reflects his own teachings on discipleship following his correction of Peter’s incomprehension of the role of the Messiah (8:34-37). Whereas in Peter’s case Jesus *taught* him the correct understanding of what Messiah or Christ means, for those who mock Jesus as he dies, Jesus *demonstrates* the true role of the Christ, even though neither Peter nor the mockers understand the significance of this role.<sup>33</sup> One may also make a case that in claiming to be the Messiah Son of God, as Jesus does in response to the High Priest’s question, Jesus affirms his commitment as God’s Messiah who will die. Certainly the narrative presents Jesus as conscious throughout that God’s plan is that he will

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<sup>31</sup> Marinus de Jonge, “The Earliest Christian use of *CHRISTOS*,” *NTS* 32 (1986): 326.

<sup>32</sup> On the use of irony in this scene see Donald Juel, *Messiah and Temple* (SBLDS 31; Missoula: Society of Biblical Literature, 1977), 47-48; Jerry Camery-Hoggart, *Irony in Mark’s Gospel: Text and Subtext* (SNTSMS 72; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 127-175.

<sup>33</sup> As Juel (*Messiah and Temple*, 116) states, “The use of the title in the passion story and in the account of Peter’s confession seems to presuppose a contrast between general messianic expectations and the confession of the crucified Jesus as Messiah.”

die, as evidenced by his passion predictions (2:20; 8:31; 9:31; 10:33-34). In answering in the affirmative to the question of the High Priest, then, Jesus may indeed be taking on the role of the true Christ, who is anointed by God to die for the salvation of others.

It is interesting that Jesus himself only uses *χριστός* twice, apart from those references we have dismissed above. Yet, his use in 12:35 may be viewed in the more general sense of clarifying that the term Son of David is not an adequate title to describe the Messiah. This does not mean that the title Son of David is not a legitimate description of the Messiah, but that Jesus may intend a more appropriate, superior title. Although Jesus does not give the more accurate title by which the Messiah is to be known, the audience understands that Jesus intends to mean the more important title Son of God.<sup>34</sup> Since, as we have seen, Mark ties the titles Christ and Son of God together at points in the narrative, the gap left in 12:35-37 is to be filled by the absent title Son of God. Thus, though the term Christ can convey a royal figure, it is probably better to understand its use in Mark as relating Jesus to God in terms of the mission God has set for Jesus.

The saying in Mark 9:41 is important for this understanding as well. While it is a saying that deals with what others do for the disciples because they “bear the name of Christ,” the idea of these ones not losing rewards sheds light on the understanding of the relationship between Jesus and God. Jesus has just taught on true discipleship, and has illustrated his point through the use of a child. His statement in 9:37 brings into focus his intention. The welcoming of a child not only means that the disciple has welcomed Jesus, but that he has also welcomed God. Thus in 9:41, the rewards not withheld from those who do good to those who bear the name of Christ, are not withheld by the one who has sent and anointed the Christ, that is God. Jesus as the *anointed* Son of God stands as the representative of God. In welcoming Jesus, a disciple welcomes God. Moreover those who do good to those who bear the name *Christ* are rewarded by God. Thus *χριστός* functions not only

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<sup>34</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 112.

to relate followers of Jesus to the Christ, but also to relate Jesus as God's anointed one who stands as envoy for God.

One further passage may shed light on this idea. Although the term *χριστός* does not appear in the baptismal scene, it is clear that Mark intends this to be the anointing of Jesus. Here Jesus receives the divine Spirit that empowers him, the divine authority that authorises him, and the divine mission which he will follow. Moreover, in this anointing Jesus is called "my beloved Son" by the divine voice. It is God who proclaims the significance of Jesus, and it is God's empowering Spirit that anoints Jesus to carry out his divinely ordained mission. Thus though the term *χριστός* does not appear in the baptism scene, the clear presentation of Jesus as the one anointed by God associates the meaning of *χριστός* with an understanding of Jesus in relationship to God.

Here, then, the function of the term in 12:35 becomes clearer. Jesus is not the *χριστός* who is primarily the Son of David, and therefore, his anointing is not that which is given to a king. Rather, he is the *χριστός* who is the Son of God, and his anointing by God is more significant. Thus, again in 12:35 the title Son of God is implied to be the more correct title by which the Messiah is to be known. Likewise, in the crucifixion scene of 15:25-39, the mockers call Jesus the Messiah, the King of Israel. Although used with a sense of irony by Mark, the affirmation of Jesus as king gives way to the true and intended proclamation of the narrative as voiced by the centurion at the foot of the cross, "Truly this man was God's Son" (15:39). In each case where Jesus may be implied to be the Messiah who is King, there may be implied a royal-messianic Christology. Yet, it seems that this is redefined through the narrative by presenting Jesus' primary identity as Son of God, which is ultimately defined as crucified Son of God. Thus royal-messianic Christology is redefined in Mark as a *theo*-logical Christology.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>35</sup> Kingsbury (*Christology*) is right to point out that God's point of view regarding Jesus is to be taken as normative for understanding the identity of Jesus in the narrative. However, I think he is wrong to conclude from the proclamation of Jesus as the Son an understanding of a strictly royal-messianic

κύριος

Κύριος presents one of the most troublesome titles in Mark's Gospel especially in terms of who the referent is when this title is used. Mark's dominant use of it is in reference to God.<sup>36</sup> In 7:28 and 11:3 the term is used in reference to Jesus, but is better translated as "sir" and "master" respectively.<sup>37</sup> Finally, though the use of it in 13:35 has Jesus in view, the parabolic nature of its use may not carry the christological weight needed to translate it with the term "Lord" in its theological sense.

Thus we are left with the use of κύριος as it functions in 1:3; 2:28; 5:19; and 12:36-37. In the following discussion then, we will first analyse the use of it in 2:28 that clearly has Jesus in view, and second its use in 1:3 and 5:19 which may imply either Jesus or God or both. Third we will discuss the use of the term in 12:36-37 where the theological significance of the title is in its link with the explicit reference to "Messiah" and the implicit reference to "Son of God."

The conflict narrative of 2:23-28 presents a scene where the Pharisees reprimand Jesus because his disciples are picking grain on the Sabbath. In response to their question Jesus claims that the "Son of Man is Lord (κύριος) of the Sabbath" (28). What is interesting about this statement by Jesus, as we discussed in the previous chapter, is that Jesus does not put himself in the place of God as Creator. Using the divine passive ἐγένετο he affirms that God is indeed the one who has created the Sabbath for humanity, a fact the audience would know to be true. Yet, Jesus seems to take an authoritative role over God's prerogative, by stating that he, the Son of Man, is Lord of the Sabbath. Much the same takes place in the

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Christology. It seems to be the case that Jesus is presented as the King, who is the Son of God. Yet, the over all thrust of the narrative demonstrates Jesus as more than a royal-messiah. He is presented as the Messiah who is the Son of God.

<sup>36</sup> See 11:9; 12:9, 11 [though by association with the "Lord" of the vineyard]; 12:29-30; 13:20; and at least one of the "Lords" mentioned in 12:36-37.

<sup>37</sup> But see R. T. France (*The Gospel of Mark* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002], 432) on reading the use of κύριος in 11:3 as a reference to God.



confrontation over who can forgive sins in 2:1-12. There, the opponents view Jesus as usurping God's authority to forgive sins, while the intention of the passage is to demonstrate Jesus as having God-given authority to forgive. In the controversy over the Sabbath in vv. 23-28 the Pharisees understand Jesus as taking God's place, but the audience knows, through God's authentication of Jesus at the baptism, that Jesus is endowed with divine authority, and thus has been given authority over the Sabbath. Thus the Markan Jesus' claim to be κύριος of the Sabbath in 2:28 is better understood in terms of Jesus' relationship to God. In other words, Jesus acts as Lord of the Sabbath because of his relationship to God, and because God has given Jesus authority to be "Lord" of the Sabbath.

The use of κύριος in 5:19, however, is not so clear. It is found on the lips of Jesus in what seems to be a reference to God.<sup>38</sup> Yet, the narrative seems to imply both that Jesus and God should be understood. Jesus has just cast out evil spirits from the Gerasene Demoniac, and the healed man requests that he might follow Jesus. Jesus, however, instructs him to go to his home and tell everyone what the Lord (κύριος) has done for him, and how *he* had mercy (ἠλέησέν) on him. Thus, Jesus seems to imply that the man should go and proclaim God's healing power which has freed him from the evil spirits. In response, however, the narrator tells the audience that the man went away and told what Jesus had done for him. It is entirely possible that Mark intends the use of κύριος here as implying both Jesus and God.<sup>39</sup> The audience knows that it is by divine power that Jesus casts out these evil spirits, and that these evil spirits themselves recognise Jesus as possessing divine power. Thus, in his actions, Jesus sees God working to subdue the evil spirits that plague the people. Moreover, the once possessed man, as well as the audience of the Gospel, understands that God has powerfully worked through Jesus in the release of this man.

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<sup>38</sup> Kingsbury (*Christology*, 110) lists it among the references in Mark that he views are intended to mean God.

<sup>39</sup> Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 354; Donald Juel, *The Gospel of Mark. Interpreting Biblical Texts*. (Nashville: Abington Press, 1999), 79-80.

God is the κύριος whose power releases this man from bondage, and Jesus is the κύριος who acts as God's authoritative agent in this release.

The closeness of this relationship through the use of κύριος is already found in 1:3, where the audience is told that the God-sent messenger will proclaim, "Prepare the way of the κύριος." We have already discussed this verse extensively in a previous chapter. Therefore, it is sufficient for us only to state briefly here that the use of the title in 1:3 is not so clearly a reference only to Jesus as is readily accepted by some scholars. As we argued in the previous discussion of this verse, it may be that the narrative introduces this relationship between Jesus and God by the use of this term. Mark has not, in my view, removed this title from God, as evidenced by its predominant use in the narrative in reference to God. Rather, it seems that in extending the term to Jesus, Mark intends to demonstrate the inseparability of God and Jesus. Thus in his identity as the κύριος Jesus acts with the authority of and in concurrence with God.

The function of one of the "Lords" in 12:36-37 should be understood as a reference to Jesus, while the other is used of God. The inquiry of Jesus in 12:35 centres on the idea that the scribes say that the Messiah is to be the Son of David. Jesus seeks to discover the authority they have in making such a statement, since it is by the authority of the Spirit of God that David says, "The Lord said to my Lord, 'sit on my right hand until I make your enemies your footstool.'" Thus, in Jesus' quotation of Ps 110:1, he demonstrates that David at least saw the Messiah as being greater than David.<sup>40</sup> The term κύριος, then, as it is used here, is linked with "Messiah." Moreover, Jesus in asking this question may imply that the title "Son of David" is not the title by which the Messiah is to be known. Within Mark's narrative, as we have seen, the title most associated with Messiah is Son of God. Thus κύριος is here linked with the implied title Son of God. Moreover, while it

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<sup>40</sup> William L. Lane, *Commentary on the Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974), 437; Bas M. F. van Iersel, *Mark: A Reader-Response Commentary* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 383.

may be debatable as to whether κύριος should be viewed as having theological significance, the context suggests that Jesus will be exalted to the right hand of the Lord as the Lord. Thus the use of the title here again links closely together God and Jesus.<sup>41</sup> It is God who is viewed here as the one who exalts Jesus as Lord, and Jesus is implied to be the Son of God who is exalted to the right hand of the Lord.

We can conclude that Mark uses the term κύριος somewhat ambiguously. However, the term is predominately used in reference to God. There are, on the other hand, references that have Jesus in explicit view and two that are ambiguous in that both Jesus and God may be implied. Thus the narrator, in order to sustain the view that Jesus' identity in Mark's narrative is in relation to God employs the christological application of the title. It may be argued then that the term κύριος, as used in Mark, is intended to link closely the presentation of Jesus with the presentation of God. While Son of God seems to function as the framework title in Mark, and directly connects Jesus in relationship to God, it seems that κύριος is used to establish Jesus as the one who acts *for* God. In other words, as the κύριος, Jesus carries out the work of God, and is surrogate for God, who is also designated by κύριος.

### *ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ θεοῦ*

This title is used only once in Mark's Gospel, and is found on the lips of the unclean spirits in 1:24. While the term is not developed in the Markan narrative, it does not stand on its own, apart from other titles. Lane has suggested that throughout Mark's Gospel individuals who suffer from illness call out to Jesus, using various titles. Yet it is only the demons and unclean spirits that associate Jesus with God.<sup>42</sup> Here, then, in 1:24 the demons clearly recognise that Jesus is the one sent from God.

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<sup>41</sup> Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1993), 145-146.

<sup>42</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 74.

Moreover, since they identify him as the Holy One of God, the audience may immediately think back to the baptismal scene where the Holy Spirit comes upon Jesus. Thus, in seeing him as the one from God empowered by God's Spirit, the unclean spirits recognise Jesus in relationship to God. This recognition by the spirits in 1:24 also serves as the precursor to the titles by which the unclean spirits will refer to Jesus in the subsequent narrative: "Son of God" (3:11) and "Son of the Most High God" (5:7).

The question is, however, how the audience is to understand this use of the title in relation to Jesus? What is intended by it, and why do the demons alone use it? In answer to the second part of the question, we may suggest that like the use of Son of God, the Holy One of God is voiced by the evil spirits because of their status as transcendental beings. They possess a superior knowledge of Jesus to that of other characters in the narrative. Indeed, the very fear expressed by them in 1:23 supposes their clear understanding of not only the identity of Jesus, but also his power over them. In answer to the first part of the question, the intention of the use of this title seems to suggest Jesus' purity over against the impurity of the demonic. Having been endowed with the Holy Spirit, Jesus encounters the unholy spirit in a showdown in which the Holy One of God executes the dynamic rule of God over the evil forces that rule the world. For the Markan audience, this narrative presents Jesus as the Holy One who brings about God's eschatological cleansing from evil spirits.

Moreover, the presentation of Jesus as the Holy One of God may also be based on the Hebrew Bible's teaching of God as the Holy One, as expressed in Lev 11:44-45. Designating Jesus as the Holy One of God, who possesses power over the unholy spirits, presents Jesus in relation to the God who alone is holy.<sup>43</sup> Furthermore, within the context of Mark 1:21-28 where Jesus' miracle-working activity is viewed by the crowd as a "new teaching" with authority, the designation of Jesus as the Holy One of God sets in the mind of the audience the idea that Jesus' miracles and teaching within the rest of Mark's story are based on the holiness of

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<sup>43</sup> Graham Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 1999), 59.

God. In other words, Jesus as the Holy Son of God, who as Lord is the surrogate for the Holy God, teaches and performs miracles declaring the coming of God's holiness among God's people.<sup>44</sup>

### ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου

Within Mark's Gospel the Son of Man designation is found only on the lips of Jesus, and has presented problems for Markan scholars for sometime.<sup>45</sup> As with the other titles used of Jesus in Mark's narrative, however, it is best to limit our discussion here to how this title for Jesus functions in the Gospel without falling into the quagmire of whether this title originated with the historical Jesus or with the early church. Specifically, in this discussion we will draw out how Jesus is presented using the self-designation within the context of the presentation of God.

Bultmann suggested a schema for categorising the Son of Man sayings that is still used today. The first category represents those sayings that speak about the earthly authority of the Son of Man. In Mark, the sayings of 2:10, 28 fall into this class. The second group are those sayings that describe the suffering, dying, and rising of the Son of Man. This category of sayings is the one predominantly used in

<sup>44</sup> On Jesus' teachings concerning God's holiness see McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 22-41.

<sup>45</sup> W. J. Moulder states, "No single problem is of more central importance in New Testament studies than the Son of Man question." (See "The Old Testament Background and the Interpretation of Mark 10:45," *NTS* 24 [1977]: 120.) While this may be considered a gross overstatement, the secondary literature discussing this title as Jesus used it and how it is used in the Markan narrative is immense, reflecting the importance of the issue. Some of the more important works on the topic include: Gustaf Dalman, *The Words of Jesus Considered in the Light of Post-Biblical Jewish Writings and the Aramaic Language*. (trans. D. Kay; Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1902); Matthew Black, "The Son of Man in the Teaching of Jesus," *ExpT* 60 (1948-49): 32-36; idem, "The Servant of the Lord and the Son of Man," *SJT* 6 (1953): 1-11; idem, "The 'Son of Man' Sayings in the Gospel Tradition," *ZNW* 60 (1969): 1-8; Geza Vermes, "The 'Son of Man' Debate," *JSNT* 1 (1978): 19-32; Joseph Fitzmeyer, "Another View of the 'Son of Man' Debate," *JSNT* 4 (1979): 58-68; Maurice Casey, *The Son of Man: The Interpretation and Influence of Daniel 7* (London: SPCK, 1979); Morna D. Hooker, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: SPCK, 1967); Barnabas Lindars, *The Son of Man: A Fresh Examination of the Son of Man Sayings in the Gospels* (London: SPCK, 1983); Seyoon Kim, "The 'Son of Man' as the Son of God" (*WUNT* 30; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1983); John R. Donahue, "Recent Studies on the Origin of 'Son of Man' in the Gospel," *CBQ* 48 (1986): 484-498. For a thorough survey of the debate from the patristic period to 1996, see Delbert Burkett, *The Son of Man Debate: A History and Evaluation* (SNTSMS 107; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Mark when Jesus refers to his death and resurrection (8:31; 9:9, 12, 31; 10:33-34, 45; 14:21, 41).<sup>46</sup> The final group of Son of Man sayings can be described as those that speak about the future coming of the Son of Man. In Mark these sayings are found in 8:38; 13:26; 14:62. Yet Mark does not seek to utilise these sayings to determine a strict chronological scheme.<sup>47</sup> Thus while these categories are helpful, we must be cautious in our utilization of them. It is the presentation of Jesus in the narrative that gives significance to the title, and not the other way around.

Beyond this, however, we may suggest that continuity and significance are exhibited in the way the narrative implies divine authority, commission, and activity in the context of each of the Son of Man sayings. In 2:10 Jesus is seen as exhibiting divine authority to forgive sins. We have already argued, following many others, that Jesus' use of the divine passive indicates that God is the one who forgives the man of his sin. But the religious leaders do not see it that way. They view Jesus as taking on the prerogative of God, who alone can forgive sins. Jesus, however, states, "the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins" (2:10). From where, one may ask does this authority come? The audience, as we have pointed out, know through their hearing of the baptism account that indeed God has given Jesus, the Son of Man, authority.<sup>48</sup> Jesus likewise expresses this God-given authority in the

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<sup>46</sup> Christopher Tuckett ("The Present Son of Man," *JSNT* 14 [1982]: 58-81) argues that 2:10, 28 should be seen in the category made up of the suffering Son of Man sayings. He points out that the use of Son of Man in 2:10, 28 "are not primarily assertions about an authority figure as such. Rather it is indicating that the one who has authority is the one who is to suffer because his authority is rejected." (65). He supports his argument by pointing out that these two occurrences are within the controversy pericope of 2:1-3:6 in which Jesus' authority is constantly questioned, and the out right threat against Jesus is explicitly stated (3:6). While I find his argument persuasive in that these conflict scenes do picture the real threat to Jesus and his authority, it is still the earthly authority of the Son of Man that is at the centre of the debate between Jesus and the religious leaders. Thus, as I will argue below, there seems to be another answer to finding continuity among the Son of Man sayings in Mark.

<sup>47</sup> Boring, "Markan Christology," 454.

<sup>48</sup> E. P. Sanders is essentially correct in his assessment that Jesus does not claim to be God here, but that he claims to speak for God. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985), 240, 273. Jesus does not claim to forgive sins as God, but claims to stand in place of God, with the authority from God to forgive sins. Sanders, however, errs in only seeing Jesus here as taking on the role of priest. Certainly, the presentation of Jesus in Mark as the one who has authority from God suggests that he is more than priest; he is the divinely appointed Son of Man who has authority on earth to forgive sins.



controversy over the Sabbath in 2:23-28. In response to the question concerning why his disciples do what is unlawful on the Sabbath, Jesus responds that the "Sabbath was made for humanity." We argued that the verb ἐγένετο could be taken as a divine passive. It is certainly the case that the audience, both of Jesus' words and Mark's narrative, would understand that God is the one who is Creator of the Sabbath. Yet, Jesus goes on to say that the "Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath." In other words, Jesus again seems to be usurping the authority of God in claiming to be Lord (κύριος) of the Sabbath. But the audience, as in the case of 2:10, knows that the God who pronounces Jesus as his Son has given Jesus, the Son of Man, divine authority.

We may also suggest that the sayings concerning the suffering of the Son of Man indicate the presence of God in this mission. In our discussion of the presentation of God we pointed out, through a careful reading of the passion sayings, God's will and activity in the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus. The divine will in the suffering of Jesus is expressed through the use of δεῖ (8:31), and the phrase "it is written" (9:12; 14:21). The divine activity in the suffering and death of Jesus is expressed through the use of παραδίδομι (9:31; 10:33; 14:41). Mark 10:45 is the only suffering Son of Man saying that does not explicitly convey divine will and activity. Yet, the use of λύτρον in 10:45 suggests that the Markan Jesus is aware that his death is carried out with reference to God's will and activity.<sup>49</sup> Moreover, within the narrative context of Mark, having followed three explicit passion predictions which all imply God's will and activity in the coming suffering, this saying itself must be understood within the divine will and activity. Equally, the divine will and activity are expressed in the sayings concerning resurrection. Since

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<sup>49</sup> We will develop this line of thought further when the discussion turns to address the death of Jesus in Mark as an act for God.

Jesus understands his death to be willed by God, he also understands his resurrection to be by God's power.<sup>50</sup>

The sayings concerning the future coming of the Son of Man also find themselves within the context of language implying God's activity in the vindication and exaltation of Jesus. In 8:38 Jesus speaks of the Son of Man coming in "the glory of his Father and with the holy angels." Certainly, the term "glory" reflects language used in reference to God in the LXX.<sup>51</sup> Yet it is Jesus' use of *πατὴρ* here that suggests not only divine activity, but also intimate relationship between God and the Son of Man. Indeed, the Son of Man is implied here to be the Son of God.<sup>52</sup>

Common motifs can also be seen in the sayings of 13:26 and 14:62. Mark 13:26 also narrates the Son of Man coming in glory, and adds that he will come on clouds with great power. The clouds suggest a divine mode of transport, and the power with which the Son of Man will come is God's power. In fact, 14:62 brings this out more clearly in Jesus' use of "the Power" (*τῆς δυνάμεως*) as a circumlocution for God. The Son of Man will come with the clouds, to sit at the right hand of "the Power." Narratively, the audience already knows that the Messiah has been spoken of by David as "my Lord" who sits at the right hand of "the Lord" (12:36-37), and here the Son of Man is seen as taking that role. It is, therefore, at the right hand of God that the Son of Man is exalted. Thus the divine presence and activity in the vindication and exaltation of the Son of Man is clearly presented in Mark.

Kingsbury has drawn attention to the presence of opposition within each of these Son of Man sayings.<sup>53</sup> In the first two, Jesus is in conflict with the religious

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<sup>50</sup> On the importance of the indivisibility of Jesus' death and resurrection in Mark see Davis, "Truly this Man was the Son of God," 122. Although Jesus' reference to his rising is expressed by the active voice, within the narrative of Mark God is the one who raises Jesus from the dead. This is explicitly brought out through the use of the passive by Jesus in 14:8, and the young man at the tomb in 16:6.

<sup>51</sup> See for example Exod 15:7,11; 16:7,10; 24:16,17; 29:43; Lev 9:6,23; Num 12:8; Isa 4:2,5; 6:1,3; Ezek 2:1; 8:4; 9:3.

<sup>52</sup> Kingsbury, *Christology*, 172.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 170.

authorities. In the passion predictions of 8:31; 9:31; 10:33, Jesus tells his listeners that he will be handed over to human authorities. In the sayings of 9:9, 12, Jesus speaks of his resurrection presupposing his sufferings in common with Elijah. In the ransom saying of 10:45 Jesus speaks of the Son of Man as the servant who has come to give his life, implying his conflict with those who will kill him. The sayings of 14:21, 41 speak of the one who will betray him, and his betrayal into the hands of sinners. And in the sayings concerning the future vindication Jesus speaks of "this sinful generation" (8:38), those who will see the Son of Man coming, possibly referring to opposing parties (13:26), and the High Priest who will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of the Power (14:62). Each one of these references to human opposition makes clear to the audience Mark's intention to set up a divine-human dichotomy.<sup>54</sup> This dichotomy functions to show that Jesus, as the Son of Man who has divine authority, who has been commissioned to do the divine will, and who will be vindicated by the divine power, is the one who is God's principal human agent. Thus in designating himself as the Son of Man within the context of the divine-human dichotomy of Mark, Jesus is viewed in relation to the presentation of God in the narrative as the human who has authority from God and who is under the authority of God. By the empowering Spirit of God, the Son of Man is able to carry out the will of God. Thus Davis is essentially correct to conclude, "Jesus possesses this divine authority despite being a son of man; he breaches the boundary between the divine and the human."<sup>55</sup>

In relation to the presentation of God in Mark's narrative, then, Jesus' role as the Son of Man, who is the one who breaches this boundary, is that of envoy for God. As envoy, Jesus carries the authority of God to bring forgiveness to humanity (2:10) and reinforce the original purpose of Creation, particularly creation of the Sabbath (2:27-28). Moreover, as the human agent of God's will, Jesus, as Son of Man accepts the divine will to stand as the mediator between God and humanity in

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<sup>54</sup> For a discussion of this divine-human dichotomy in the Son of Man sayings see Davis, "Mark's Christological Paradox," 10.

<sup>55</sup> Davis, "Truly this Man was the Son of God," 114-115.

his death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33, 45). It is by his death that God is also victorious in the raising of the Son and in the vindication of the Son (8:31; 9:9, 31; 10:34).

Indeed the Son of Man title remains enigmatic to a great extent. Yet, the audience is able to grasp continuity in Jesus' use of the title by first associating the title as a self-reference. Secondly, and more importantly, the title has continuity in that the divine presence, will, and activity are narrated within the context of each saying. The identity and significance of the Markan Jesus as the Son of Man, then, is that he has been given divine authority, divine commission, and will receive divine vindication. Thus the audience is reliant on these factors in understanding Mark's intention in the use of the phrase Son of Man.

### *υἱὸς Δαβίδ*

Son of David appears in only two scenes within Mark, only one in which it is directly associated with Jesus. In one scene, 10:47-48, the blind man named Bartimaeus calls Jesus Son of David. The other reference, however, is more confusing in relation to Jesus, for the title is not explicitly applied to Jesus (12:35-37), but must be inferred by the audience's association of the title "Christ" with Jesus, clearly present in Mark's narrative. There is also a possibility that the cry of the crowd in 11:9-10 may assist the audience in comprehending the Markan usage of this title in reference to Jesus. It will be helpful, then, to investigate each of these passages in context in order to draw out the audience's understanding.

Mark 10:46-52 narrates the calling out of the blind man named Bartimaeus to Jesus in order to be healed of his blindness. Crucial for our understanding of the address to Jesus by the man will be an understanding of the reason for the man's request. First, the man calls out for Jesus to have mercy on him. He seeks to be healed of his blindness, and he must know of Jesus' power to give sight. The man is presented as a persistent character, who calls out to Jesus as Son of David twice. Set against this man who seeks to see is the narrative portrayal of the disciples as blind followers of Jesus. Mark has narrated their inability to see the truth about Jesus.

Here, however, one who has not been part of the twelve seeks to see. In seeking to see, then, he appeals to the mercy the Son of David can have on him. Thus, in calling Jesus "Son of David," Bartimaeus understands Jesus as the one who is merciful and has the power to heal. Jesus does not command the man to be silent, and he seems to accept the Son of David title.

This is crucial for the audience's understanding of Jesus' question, then, in 12:25. They are prepared by the narrator not to throw the title out. Jesus, however, intends to point beyond the idea of the Messiah as Son of David to a more theological understanding of his identity and significance. The form of Jesus' question implies that a conflict may exist between what Scripture says about the Messiah and the Son of David, and what the scribes say about this relationship.<sup>56</sup> This is supported clearly by Jesus' answer to his own question, in which he teaches that the Messiah must be more than the Son of David, because David himself, by the Holy Spirit, calls him "my Lord." Thus, as Jesus states, "How is he his son?" Again, the pericope of 10:46-52 suggests that Jesus does not reject the term Son of David in reference to himself. Moreover, here in his question to his listeners he does not out-right reject the title as a designation for the Messiah.<sup>57</sup> Rather, it seems that Jesus implies that the significance and identity of the Messiah cannot be fully realized in the title Son of David. A more adequate title is thus needed.

We have already argued above that Son of God seems to be the framework title in Mark's Gospel. Moreover, the two titles, Son of God and Messiah, are linked together in Mark 1:1. More crucial is the fact that God is the one who has announced Jesus as the Son of God. Therefore, here in 12:35-37 the Markan audience is to have

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<sup>56</sup> See David Daube, *New Testament and Rabbinic Judaism* (London: University of London-The Athlone Press, 1956), 158-169 who classifies Jesus' question as a question of *haggadah*.

<sup>57</sup> Donald Juel, *Messianic Exegesis* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1988), 142; Ben Witherington, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000), 333. Davis ("Truly this Man was the Son of God," 179) overstates his case by saying that Mark totally rejects the title Son of David. He concludes that Jesus is "Son of God in a way that excludes simultaneous sonship to David" (193). While I agree with his assessment that Mark's Christology is not a royal messianic Christology, I would cautiously say that Mark intends the title Son of David to function as a pointer to his framework title Son of God. Thus the Davidic sonship of Jesus is not fully rejected, but is subordinate to divine sonship.

in view the more appropriate title of "Son of God."<sup>58</sup> This, however, is made much clearer when the audience listens closely to Jesus' first question. "How can the scribes say that the Messiah is the Son of David?" In asking the question in this way, Jesus is seeking to understand the reason on which the scribes base their claim. In other words, he is asking for Scriptural proof to support their view. This is understood in light of Jesus' recent teachings concerning taxes, resurrection, and the greatest commandment. In each of these debates Jesus appeals to the authority of God. Moreover, in response to his own question here about the Messiah, he bases his case on Scripture (Ps 110:1). Thus throughout his teaching in Mark 12 Jesus is viewed as pointing to God as the authority in the issues that are discussed, including the identity of the Messiah. Mark, then, may have the intention of guiding the audience to think about God's authority in the identification of Jesus over against the authority of the scribes to identify the Messiah. Thus the audience, having competence to reflect back on the authoritative voice in relation to Jesus' identity, understand that as David spoke by inspiration from the Spirit of God in his statement about the Messiah, so God has spoken in the narrative of Mark, giving identity and significance to Jesus as Son of God. The audience is left then, to choose which voice is more authoritative, God's or the scribes. The narrative asks them to choose God's voice. Thus, Kingsbury is correct to state that the more important title implied in Jesus' question is "Son of God."<sup>59</sup>

We see, therefore, that the title "Son of David," though not rejected by Mark, does not function as an important christological title. Its function, rather, seems to be to point beyond its own value as a title to the more appropriate title used by Mark to express the identity of the Messiah, that is the Son of God, who will be exalted to God's right hand.

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<sup>58</sup> Kingsbury makes these very points in *Christology*, 112-113.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 114. See also Bas M. van Iersel, *Der Sohn in den synoptischen Jesusworten* (NovTSup. 3; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1961), 171-173.



### Summary

The narrator's art of presenting Jesus includes the use of titles to name Jesus. We have argued here that "Son of God" serves as the framework title and all other titles must be understood in relation to this one. Moreover, we have also stated that the understanding of these titles is made clearer within the Markan narrative, and not necessarily in their usage outside of and prior to that narrative. This does not mean that a real Markan audience would not have preformed ideas about these titles, based not only upon their understanding of these titles from Jewish heritage, but also upon their understanding of these titles as Jesus may have used them. What seems to be at work through the narrative's use of these titles is an intentional reformulation of their meaning. Thus, a Markan audience is implored by the narrative to accept a fresh understanding of these titles as they are related through the telling of the story. In doing so, they are asked to take seriously the narrator's art of telling who Jesus is.

Yet, it is now important that we turn to the narrator's art of *showing* who Jesus is. For it is not primarily the titles which give identity and significance to Jesus. Rather it is Jesus' words and activity that give further understanding to these titles.

### The Narrative Presentation of Jesus

In the previous section we briefly discussed how Mark uses Christological titles to tell the audience how Jesus is to be seen in relationship with God. For many years these titles were viewed as the key to understanding New Testament Christology. The rise of narrative approaches to the Gospels, however, has led more recent scholars to propose that a Christology focused only on the titles used to designate Jesus truncates a true understanding of the narratives' presentation of Jesus. Robert Tannehill initially demonstrated this in his narrative analysis of the presentation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel.

Thus, we are prompted by this turn in scholarly discussion of New Testament Christology, and also by the method chosen for this analysis, which takes the Gospel as a whole literary document as its primary focus, to look not only to the titles used

to speak of Jesus, but also the narrative portrayal of Jesus. In terminology used by Booth, then, the following will be an investigation into the narrator's art of *showing* the audience who Jesus is. In doing so, we will seek to lay out the picture of Jesus through four different steps. In the first step, we will analyse statements or narrative scenes in which Jesus is presented as the one sent from God. Secondly, we will turn our attention to actions performed for God by Jesus, namely the miracles. Thirdly, our attention will turn to Jesus' teaching and preaching which is centred on God and God's activity in the narrative. Finally, we will closely investigate Jesus' death and exaltation in Mark as an act of and for God. Our analysis will demonstrate that Jesus' identity and significance throughout Mark's narrative is to be understood primarily in terms of the narrative's presentation of God as the one who sends, authenticates, commissions, vindicates, and exalts Jesus.

### **Jesus as the One sent from God**

To say that Jesus is presented as the one sent from God in Mark's Gospel might be stating the obvious.<sup>60</sup> But a detailed analysis of statements and narratives in which this is explicitly or implicitly expressed will be helpful not only for its own sake, but also for the sake of discussions that will follow.

The first instance in which Jesus is presented as the one sent from God is found in the prologue to the narrative. The extensive discussion of the presentation of God in the prologue in the previous chapter demonstrated the significance of this opening for the remainder of the Gospel. This is also true for understanding Jesus as the one sent from God. This relationship is first presented in the conflation of Old Testament texts found in 1:2-3. Here God is presented as the sender of the "messenger" who is to prepare the way of the Lord, and to make straight the paths of Jesus. The paths of which God speaks is the way (ὁδός) Jesus will walk through the

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<sup>60</sup> I have not found any work that has systematically investigated Jesus as the one sent from God in Mark's narrative. However, see Edmund Arens, *The Elthen-Sayings in the Synoptic Gospels* (Freiburg: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1976); Warren Carter, "Jesus' 'I have come' Statements in Matthew's Gospel," *CBQ* 60 (1998): 44-62; Jakob van Bruggen, *Jesus the Son of God: The Gospel Narratives as Message* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 95-96.

narrative.<sup>61</sup> Thus in sending John, the messenger, ahead of Jesus to prepare the way of Jesus, God is seen as the one who also sends Jesus. Indeed, John says that the one coming after him is greater than he is (1:7). As we have suggested, Mark, in not narrating the birth or genealogy of Jesus, may intend the audience to understand the significance of Jesus as being completely in God.<sup>62</sup> This is not to deny his humanity or human family relations, for Mark indicates these relationships later in the Gospel (3:31). But in the initial steps of the narrative, Jesus is viewed primarily as the one sent from God.

This is made clearer through the voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus as "my Son." This vision of Jesus serves as the authentication of Jesus by God to act as representative of God throughout the narrative. All the actions and teaching of Jesus follow from this experience, and each question that arises in the narrative concerning the identity of Jesus, finds its answer in this scene. Thus the scene serves as the basis on which Jesus is viewed as the one sent from God. Moreover, the Spirit's action in throwing Jesus out into the wilderness demonstrates the authority God has over Jesus. Jesus is the one sent to endure the temptations of Satan in order to be prepared to carry out the actions God has commissioned him to do. The prologue functions, therefore, to inform the audience that Jesus is the one sent from God.

This also may be evidenced in the statements where Jesus, the narrator, or another character refers to Jesus' coming. The narrator has told us that Jesus came (ἤλθεν) proclaiming the good news, and that in his coming God's rule has come

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<sup>61</sup> On the structural significance of "the way" in Mark see William M. Swartley, "Structural Function of the Term 'Way'," in *The New Way of Jesus: Essays Presented to Howard Charles* (ed. W. Klassen; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1980), 68-80.

<sup>62</sup> Philip Davis ("Christology, Discipleship, and Self-Understanding in the Gospel of Mark," in *Self-Definition and Self Discovery in Early Christianity: A Case of Shifting Horizons* [ed. D. Hawkin & T. Robinson; Lewiston: Mellen Press, 1990], 109) has suggested that the "Markan 'omission' involve matters that are not susceptible of imitation" and suggest that Mark's narrative may function as a "blueprint for the Christian life: it begins with baptism, proceeds with the vigorous pursuit of ministry in the face of temptation and opposition, and culminates in suffering and death oriented towards an as-yet unseen vindication." Davis, I think, is right in his suggestion, which does not prevent a view that see the audience as understanding Markan omissions as presenting Jesus as having his significance from God. I will have opportunity to entertain Davis on this point in later discussion on theology and discipleship.

near (ἤγγικεν). This coming is quickly realised by the unclean spirits of 1:24 who ask Jesus, “Have you come (ἦλθες) to destroy us?” The use of the verb in this statement by the spirit is followed by an infinitive of purpose detailing the purpose for which Jesus has come.<sup>63</sup> These demons recognise the authority of the one who has been sent and set apart for God’s purposes.

Jesus himself interprets his coming in three different statements, in all of which he identifies the purpose for which he has come. Moreover, Jesus defines these purposes in terms the audience would recognise as a divine mission. In response to the opponents’ question put to Jesus’ disciples on why he eats with sinners and tax collectors in 2:15-17, Jesus responds, “I have come (ἦλθον) to call not the righteous but sinners.” In stating his mission in terms of calling sinners, as well as serving as a doctor for the sick, the Markan narrative reflects the events that had taken place earlier in the narrative regarding the paralytic. In 2:1-12 a paralytic is brought to Jesus by his friends. Jesus pronounces that the man’s sins are forgiven. The result, after some debate with the opponents, is that the man is healed. Thus the audience is prepared to link together the idea of healing and forgiveness, which is common in the Old Testament.<sup>64</sup> In stating his mission in terms of healing the sick and calling the sinners, Jesus signifies not only his mission as the one calling all to repent and believe in the Gospel of God, but also his authority as the one sent by God.

Later in the narrative this same idea is expressed in Jesus’ ransom saying in 10:45. This saying follows a conversation with James and John concerning seats of authority. Although in the context the saying sets Jesus as the ultimate example of true service, the statement is certainly christological and the image presented echoes the theme from Isa 53 regarding the suffering servant of YHWH.<sup>65</sup> Indeed, Jesus

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<sup>63</sup> C. E. B. Cranfield, *The Gospel According to Saint Mark* (Cambridge: University Press, 1959), 76.

<sup>64</sup> See for example 2 Chr 7:14; Ps 41:4; 103:3; 147:3; Isa 57:18-19; Jer 3:22; Hos 14:4.

<sup>65</sup> The evidence for Isa 53 as being the backdrop to Jesus’ saying in Mark 10:45 has not convinced all scholars. Two substantial New Testament scholars have rejected this view. See C. K. Barrett, “The Background of Mk 10:45,” in *New Testament Essays* (ed. by A. J. B. Higgins; Manchester:

sees his mission as one of service and his death as a ransom for many. His statement, "For the Son of Man came (ἦλθεν) not to be served but to serve..." echoes what he has stated in 2:17. Both of these statements employ an infinitive in which the purpose for Jesus' coming is clearly articulated.

One other statement made by Jesus regarding his coming and the purpose of his coming is not as clear-cut as these previous two, but it does seem probable that it contains the same basic idea. In 1:38 Jesus tells his disciples, "Let us go on to the neighboring towns, so that I may proclaim the message there also; for that is what I came out (ἐξῆλθον) to do." At first glance, we may suppose that this is a reference to his coming from Capernaum, where he went in 1:21.<sup>66</sup> Yet, it may also be possible to understand the Markan Jesus as referring to his coming from God. We have already drawn attention to his coming to preach as expressed in 1:14. Indeed, we find here in 1:38 Jesus express the very purpose for his coming, to proclaim.<sup>67</sup> Thus Jesus, in these statements concerning his coming, defines clearly the purposes for which he has come, that is to preach, to heal, to forgive, to serve, and to give his life. The audience knows from their hearing of the baptismal story that Jesus has come from God.

Yet, the crowd also seems to convey that Jesus is the one sent from God through their proclamation of 11:9. Although it might be debated as to their intention, Mark clearly uses their proclamation to reiterate to his audience that Jesus

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University Press, 1959), 1-18; M. Hooker, *Jesus and the Servant* (London: SPCK, 1959), 74-79; *idem*, *The Son of Man in Mark* (London: SPCK, 1967), 141f. However, I find the arguments of those who view the evidence as pointing to an allusion to Isa 53 more persuasive. See Kim, "The 'Son of Man'" as the Son of God, 52-58; Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus in Mark* (WUNT 88; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1997), 270-284; *idem*, "Jesus' Death, Isaiah 53, and Mark 10:45: A Crux Revisited," in *Jesus and the Suffering Servant: Isaiah 53 and Christian Origins* (ed. W. H. Bellinger, Jr. and W. R. Farmer; Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press International, 1998), 125-151.

<sup>66</sup> Robert A. Guelich, *Mark 1-8:26*. Word Biblical Commentary. 34A. (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1989), 70.

<sup>67</sup> E. Lohmeyer, *Das Evangelium Des Markus*. MeyK 2. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1963), 43; Joachim Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus* (Zürich/ Neukirchen: Benzinger/ Neukirchener, 1978), 1:89; D. E. Nineham, *The Gospel of St. Mark* (Middlesex: Penguin Press, 1963), 85. See also Cranfield (*Mark*, 89-90) who points out that Luke's use of ἀπεστάλην gives a clue to his understanding of the intention.

does not come on his own, but is indeed the one who comes (ὁ ἐρχόμενος) in the name of the Lord. Thus, again, Jesus is seen as the one sent by God.

This idea of Jesus being the one sent from God is explicitly expressed in 9:37, and implied through the parable of 12:1-12. In seeking to make his point concerning the true meaning of discipleship and service in, Jesus takes to himself a child (9:36). He then states, "Whoever welcomes one such child in my name welcomes me, and whoever, welcomes me welcomes not me but the one who sent (ἀποστείλαντά) me." Again, the audience is fully aware whom Jesus has in mind when he speaks about the one who sent him. Clearly it is God. Jesus' statement, however, makes clear that he himself serves as representative for God, for in welcoming him, true disciples also welcome God, the one who has sent Jesus. The person, who then encounters Jesus as the one sent from God, encounters also the God who has sent Jesus. Thus, as Donahue comments, "... the authority of Jesus as mediator and faithful representative is enhanced. He re-presents the sender perfectly."<sup>68</sup> This is illustrated through the parable of the Wicked Tenants, when the audience understands the "owner" of the vineyard as God and the "son" of the owner as Jesus. After sending several servants, the owner decides to send (ἀπέστειλεν) his beloved son. In sending the son, then, the owner sends his authoritative representative. What is interesting is that when the son is killed, there are no more servants or sons to send, so the owner himself will come (ἐλεύσεται) and destroy the tenants.

There are, however, other statements and narratives throughout the Gospel that remind the audience of Jesus as the one sent from God. In 3:13-19 Jesus himself chooses twelve men whom he sends out to proclaim the message. He gives them authority to do the things that he himself does in the narrative, i.e. to cast out demons. Significantly all this takes place on a mountain, a setting in the biblical narratives where divine revelation takes place (e.g. Exod 3:1-3; 19:3, 16-22; 24:12-

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<sup>68</sup> John R. Donahue, "A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark," *JBL* 101 (1982): 589.



18; Deut 5:4-5, 22-23; 9:9-10).<sup>69</sup> In choosing these and sending them out, then, Jesus acts as the one who has the authority to choose the new people of God. He is the one sent by God into the world as God's representative, who in turn sends those he has chosen into the world to act as his representatives (3:13-19; 6:7-13; cf. 13:9). This authentication of Jesus as the one sent from God who has the authority to send others is hinted at in another scene on a mountain, the transfiguration. Here Jesus and three of his disciples are gathered on the mountain, where the voice from the cloud authenticates Jesus as "my Son," and commands these disciples to "listen to him" (9:7). The intention of the command is to set forth Jesus as the authoritative representative of God on earth. Thus, as in the baptism, the voice of God authenticates Jesus as the one God has sent who carries the authority of God. The statement made by Peter in 10:28 also conveys this idea. Peter claims, "We have left everything and followed you." In response Jesus assures him that anyone who leaves everything will receive back a "hundredfold" in this age. It is his next phrase which highlights his identity as the one sent from God. He states, "... and in the age to come eternal life." By making such a statement, Jesus exercises his authority to promise the rewards that only God can give. Thus he serves here as the representative of God, and as the one sent from God, who alone is the giver of life eternal.

The questions raised by the authorities also imply Jesus as the one sent from God. In 8:11-13 the Pharisees ask for a sign from heaven. Their intention in asking this question is to test Jesus, not to believe in him. Jesus, however, refuses to give them a sign from heaven. This refusal, from a literary standpoint, works in two ways. On the one hand, within the context of the characters, it functions to fuel the disbelief of the Pharisees regarding Jesus as the one sent from God. On the other hand, from the audience's perspective, Jesus' refusal to give a sign demonstrates his authority from God, over against the authority of the Pharisees. Jesus, in refusing to give a sign from heaven, refuses to submit to these authorities, and instead submits to

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<sup>69</sup> On the importance of topographical settings, such as the mountain, in Mark see Elizabeth S. Malbon, *Narrative Space and Mythic Meaning in Mark* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986).

the one who has sent him, and has acknowledged him via a sign from heaven (1:9-11). This is carried further in the narrative in the question the leaders raise concerning the source of Jesus' authority for his actions in the temple (11:27-33). Here they ask from where his authority to do such things comes. In return, Jesus asks them a question concerning the source of John's baptism. They refuse to answer, but in their discussion of the possible answers they imply that John's baptism came from heaven. The audience knows this to be true, especially through the narrative portrayal of John as the messenger sent from God, and as the one who baptises Jesus. In Jesus' refusal to provide them with an answer, he implies that his authority also comes from heaven, which the audience knows to be true. The audience, therefore, is left to understand Jesus as the one sent from God with divine authority to refuse to give signs to the unbelieving.

Mark seems to use various narrative voices and techniques to demonstrate that Jesus is the one sent from God. In doing so, he sets Jesus in relation to God as the one who represents God on earth. Thus what Jesus does on earth is to be viewed as God's actions, or actions done for God. It is to this aspect of Mark's Christology that we now turn.

### Jesus as Actor for God

The miracles and exorcisms performed by Jesus in Mark's Gospel have not only presented historical problems for scholars for some time, but have also generated debate over their significance. Many have championed the view which sees Jesus as a Hellenistic divine man or θεῖος ἀνὴρ.<sup>70</sup> Space prevents us from giving our own critique of this understanding of Mark's presentation of Jesus.<sup>71</sup> Our concern here is with the presentation of Jesus' miracles in Mark as actions for God, the basis of which will come from the narrative itself, and not primarily from a

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<sup>70</sup> See especially Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*; idem, "The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel," *ZNW* 59 (1968), 145-168.

<sup>71</sup> For a summary and critique of this view see Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Markan Miracle Traditions*; Kingsbury, *Christology*, 25-45.

supposed type found in Hellenistic Judaism. We are seeking instead to establish the christological function of the miracles and how they draw the audience's attention to understand Jesus in relation to God.

To establish our case that the miracles of Jesus should be viewed as actions for God, i.e., actions that Jesus does as the one sent from God, it will be significant to view these miracles in light of the Markan prologue. There God is presented as an active character, Jesus is given divine authority at the baptism, and Jesus announces the coming rule of God and proclaims the gospel of God. In the previous chapter where analysis was conducted on the presentation of God in Mark's Gospel, the significance of the "ripping" of the heavens, the descending of the Spirit of God, and the speaking of the voice from God were discussed. The point that was made was that Mark intended his audience to comprehend this rupture in the heavens as irreparable, and as a portent of God's coming upon the earth. Moreover, I have argued throughout my thesis that the audience would regard this scene as the point at which questions over Jesus' authority are answered. He is the one who has been acknowledged by God as the Son and the one on whom the Spirit of God rests. Therefore, Jesus is the authoritative Son of God. This authority is evident in Jesus' announcement of the kingdom of God in 1:14-15. Thus the in-breaking of God at the baptism, and Jesus' announcement that the reign of God is at hand on the earth, sets the stage for Jesus' actions throughout the narrative.<sup>72</sup> The miracles and exorcisms performed by Jesus, therefore, are better understood in light of this than in light of a *theios aner* thesis.

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<sup>72</sup> Aloysius M. Ambrozic (*The Hidden Kingdom: A Redaction-Critical Study of the References to the Kingdom of God in Mark's Gospel* [CBQMS 2; Washington: Catholic Biblical Association, 1972], 44-45) argues that everything Jesus does and says in Mark is reliant on his proclamation of the kingdom in 1:14-15. While I agree with this view, I do so only partially. I think it better to understand everything Jesus does and says in light of Mark's prologue inclusive of 1:1-15. Indeed, Jesus' activity may be based on his announcement of the coming kingdom, but his authority to proclaim this, and to do all which he does in the narrative comes from God, who is, so to speak, the first character in the narrative (1:2-3), and who gives Jesus authentication and authority at the baptism.

Moreover, as some scholars have suggested, the miracles of Jesus in Mark's Gospel function as parables of Jesus' proclamation of God's reign.<sup>73</sup> Jesus is the authoritative proclaimer of God's reign, and in the miracles his proclamation of the kingdom becomes visible both to the characters in the narrative, and to the audience of the Gospel. Thus, our intention in the following discussion is to propose several functions these miracles execute in Mark's narrative. Each of these functions, it will be seen, serves to demonstrate that Mark is concerned to show his Christology as an aspect of his theology.<sup>74</sup>

### *Jesus' Miracles and God's Authority*

The source of Jesus' authority to do and teach the things he does is under scrutiny throughout Mark, and is the focus in his first deed in the narrative (1:22-28). In describing the response of the crowd to his teaching, the narrator tells the audience that Jesus taught with authority, and not like the scribes. Yet, the audience of Jesus in the narrative responds similarly only after Jesus casts out the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue. Their response to this miracle, "What is this? A new teaching- with authority!" (1:27) functions to ask the Markan audience to answer the question from their knowledge of the authority given Jesus by God in the baptism. They know that God has given Jesus this authority. Moreover, this authority is

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<sup>73</sup> Frank Matera, "He Saved Others; He Cannot Save Himself: A Literary Critical Perspective on the Markan Miracles," *Int* 47 (1993): 15-26; Craig L. Blomberg, "The Miracles as Parables," in *Gospel Perspectives: The Miracles of Jesus* (ed. D. Wenham & C. Blomberg; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1986), 327-359. See also, Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 61-63, 98-99.

<sup>74</sup> Paul Achtemeier ("Person and Deed: Jesus and the Storm-Tossed Sea," *Int* 16 [1962]: 170) rightly notes, "A careful study of the miracles will indicate that the significance lies, not in the acts themselves but in the *person* who performs them. Therefore, Jesus does not draw significance from the fact that he performs miracles; rather, the miracles are significant because they are performed by Jesus, who is the Son of God." My intention in discussing the function of the miracles in Mark is not to suggest that these miracles give significance to Jesus, for in the Markan narrative it seems that it is God who gives significance to Jesus. Rather, I am seeking to show that in his significance as the Son of God, Jesus carries out deeds for God, namely in the form of miracles. Thus the function of the miracles in Mark is to present Jesus as the One sent from God who carries out actions for God.

manifested in Jesus' extending God's forgiveness to the paralytic of 2:1-12. Jesus proves his authority to forgive sins by his authority to heal the man.<sup>75</sup>

This question over Jesus' authority is raised by his opponents on a number of occasions, two that are relevant within our discussion of the miracles of Jesus as acts for God. The first of these is found in the scene where Jesus is accused of casting out demons by the power of Beelzebul (3:20-27). While the explicit question over his authority to cast out demons is not voiced, the accusation serves to show that this was indeed under scrutiny by his opponents. Jesus responds to this accusation by pointing out the illogical nature of such a statement. His answer is that Satan's kingdom cannot stand if it is divided; Satan cannot stand against Satan (23-26). If this were to occur, Satan's demise would be by his own doing. Jesus, however, states that the strong man's house is conquered when the strong man is bound. Jesus sees his actions for God against the demons as binding the strong man, that is Satan. Moreover, he also sees this casting out of demons as authority from God. In fact, he implies it to be the work of God's Spirit.<sup>76</sup> The opponents' accusation that he does this "by the ruler of the demons" is blasphemy against God's Spirit which has empowered Jesus with authority to cast out these demons. Thus, through this exchange between Jesus and the religious authorities, Jesus is presented as the one whose actions against the enemies of God give evidence of his divine authority.

The second implied test of Jesus' authority is not associated with a miracle per se, but the absence of that miracle.<sup>77</sup> In 8:11-13 Mark states that the Pharisees

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<sup>75</sup> Walter Wink ("Mark 2:1-12," *Int* 38 [1982]: 61) states, "The stated purpose of the dealing was a demonstration that Jesus had the power to forgive sins. There is no escaping the language and intention of the text."

<sup>76</sup> It is important to notice, as Morna Hooker (*The Gospel According to St. Mark* [London: A&C Black, 1991], 116) points out, that the saying of Jesus regarding the division of Satan's house is not the reason for the strong man's defeat. Rather, it is "because he had been overcome by someone stronger." Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Holy Spirit and the Gospel Tradition* (London: SPCK, 1958), 61.

<sup>77</sup> Twelftree (*Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 82) argues that the use of *σημεῖον* in 8:11 means that these Pharisees were looking for something significantly different than the miracles Jesus had performed up to this point. While this is probably the case, the very appeal for a "sign from heaven" must be taken to mean a miracle, whether it is one that is different or not.

came to “him and asked him for a sign from heaven, to test him.”<sup>78</sup> In asking for such a sign, they imply that they seek confirmation from God that Jesus has authority.<sup>79</sup> Jesus, however, states, “Truly (ἀμὴν) I say to you, no sign will be given (δοθήσεται) to this generation.”<sup>80</sup> The performance of miracles is not for the purpose of giving signs to those who have no faith. Rather, they are demonstrations that Jesus has authority from God to perform miracles. Indeed, the miracles of Jesus are usually done in response to a person’s expression of faith in Jesus’ authority and power to heal and cast out demons (see esp. 5:21-43). By denying the performance of a miracle at the beck and call of these opponents, Jesus shows that his authority is from God, and not from them.

### *Jesus Miracles and God’s defeat of God’s Enemies*

The temptation narrative of 1:12-13, though not a miracle, may be intended more than just to show that Jesus is the one who does not succumb to the temptations of Satan. Indeed, the throwing out of Jesus into the wilderness by the Spirit of God to face Satan may stand in the Markan narrative as the initial clash between God and his archenemy Satan.<sup>81</sup> Thus, the temptation of Jesus sets the stage for the battle Jesus will conduct against God’s enemies as the one sent from God.<sup>82</sup>

This war against the demons or unclean spirits takes place on four separate occasions. In two of these encounters with unclean spirits, Jesus is acknowledged by

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<sup>78</sup> On the demonic connotations in this statement see Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 500.

<sup>79</sup> Although he does not view the Pharisees as asking for a sign from God, Jeffrey B. Gibson (*The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* [JSNTSup 112; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995], 180) does view the issue of debate here as being over whether Jesus is “of God”.

<sup>80</sup> On taking δοθήσεται as a divine passive implying God’s action in the giving, see the discussion in chapter 2, and Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 501.

<sup>81</sup> Marcus (*Mark 1-8*, 168) states, “It is as though the Spirit, having finally found the human instrument through whom it can accomplish its ends, is now spoiling for a fight with the Adversary.” This is not to deny that Satan may be used here as a servant of God in the testing of the Son. As Garrett has shown, Satan’s role in relation to God is ambiguous. See Susan R. Garrett, *Temptations of Jesus in Mark’s Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 19-49.

<sup>82</sup> Rhoads and Michie, *Mark as Story*, 77.



the demons as the one in whom the power of God resides. In 1:22-28 Jesus is called the "Holy One of God" whose purpose in coming is to destroy the unclean spirits, who, as enemies of God, ransack God's creation.<sup>83</sup> Moreover, in the scene where Jesus confronts the legion of demons in 5:1-20, Jesus is acknowledged as the Son of God, and the one who has the power to grant certain wishes to the spirits, thus demonstrating his power over the enemies of God.

Howard Kee has also suggested that Mark's use of ἐπιτιμᾶω to describe Jesus' actions toward the unclean spirits in 1:25 and 9:25 echoes the use of the term in the Septuagint. His analysis of its use in the Septuagint demonstrates that in thirteen out of the twenty-one times it is used "the point being made is that God is effecting eschatological judgement in order to bring to fulfilment his purpose on earth."<sup>84</sup> This is significant in that the use of the term within the exorcisms occurs only in the first and last exorcisms performed by Jesus in Mark's Gospel. The first of these (1:22-28) may serve Mark as "paradigmatic and programmatic for his story of Jesus."<sup>85</sup> In other words, the coming of God in the person of the Son is viewed as the eschatological conquest of God over his enemies. The exorcisms to follow, then, are to be viewed in light of Jesus' actions in 1:22-28. The last of these exorcisms (9:14-29) again uses the verb ἐπιτιμᾶω and may serve to emphasise more than Jesus' power to cast out unclean spirits. The miracle is prompted by the inability of the disciples to cast an unclean spirit from a boy. Jesus, however, as the one who

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<sup>83</sup> R. H. Lightfoot (*The Gospel Message of St. Mark* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950], 21) argues that the question put to Jesus by the unclean spirits is better understood as a statement, "thou art come to destroy us" indicating that Mark uses the voice of the demons "to emphasize that one great purpose of the coming of Messiah was the destruction of the powers of evil." It seems to me that however the words of the spirits are understood, the purpose for their presence is to emphasise Jesus' role in the destruction of the evil powers. Cf. Cranfield (*Mark* 76) who states, "In either case it expresses a mixture of fear and defiance."

<sup>84</sup> Howard C. Kee, "The Terminology of Mark's Exorcism Stories," *NTS* 14 (1967/68): 236. See for example Ps 9:6; 105:9; 106:29; Zech 3:3.

<sup>85</sup> Graham H. Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist* (WUNT 54; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1993), 57. See also Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), I:127; J. C. Iwe, *Jesus in the Synagogue of Capernaum: The Pericope and Its Programmatic Character for the Gospel of Mark. An Exegetico-Theological Study of Mk 1:21-28* (Rome: Editrice Pontificia Università Gregoriana, 1999).

battles against the enemies of God, “rebukes” the spirit, calling him out of the boy. The disciples are frustrated at their failure and inquire as to why they could not cast out the spirit. Jesus replies, “This kind can come out only through prayer.” The statement serves to point the disciples to the true source for overcoming the enemies of God, that is the power of God that is given through prayer. Thus, the disciples themselves are able to have this power, but only when this power comes from God.

The enemies of God, however, are not limited to the unclean spirits, for the chaos functions as that which wars against the purposes of God in the world. This is especially in view in the storm-stilling scene of 4:35-41.<sup>86</sup> In this nature miracle of Jesus, the distress of the disciples is contrasted with the calmness of Jesus, who sleeps while the others panic. Behind this event lies the Jewish understanding that God alone controls the wind and the waves (Ps 65:7; 89:9; 107:23-32), and that the sea stands as an evil force of chaos.<sup>87</sup> The seriousness of the situation is brought out by Peter’s question (4:38), suggesting that he viewed the situation as life threatening. Jesus’ response does not in anyway question Peter’s view of the situation, but rather questions the faith these disciples had. Thus it is clear that, like the demon possessed people Jesus encounters, the sea, under the evil powers, also stands against the purposes of God, and threatens the lives of the disciples and the Son of God.

Jesus’ actions, however, subdue the chaos. His faith in the power of God to work through him is evident in not only his composure of calmness, but in his actions against the storm. Again, the verb ἐπιτιμᾶω is used by Mark to describe Jesus’ actions toward God’s enemies, this time the wind and the waves. His rebuke of these elements demonstrates his divine power as the one who wars against the enemies of God.

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<sup>86</sup> From a literary perspective, Ulrich Mauser has drawn attention to the similarity between the raging sea in 4:35-41 and the raging demoniac in 5:1-20, as well as the calm sea and the calm man after Jesus’ actions in these two scenes. See his *Christ in the Wilderness: The Wilderness Theme in the Second Gospel and its Basis in the Tradition* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 126.

<sup>87</sup> See esp. the comments in Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 338-339. Cf. Howard C. Kee, *Miracle in the Early Christian World* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), 163; Lane, *Mark*, 176n94; Achtemeier, “Person and Deed”; Twelftree, *Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 70, 373n86.

*Jesus' Miracles and God's Cleansing from Impurity*

The idea of clean and unclean is found often in Mark.<sup>88</sup> A case can be made that Jesus' eating with tax collectors and sinners in 2:13-17 is viewed by the authorities as impure.<sup>89</sup> Moreover, the issue over washing hands in Mark 7 again presents Jesus in debate with his opponents. There are, however, miracle stories in Mark's narrative in which Jesus comes into contact with those who are ritually unclean. Yet, in encountering these, Jesus does not himself become impure. Rather, in his encounter with each, he extends to them God's cleansing from impurity.

We have already discussed the importance of the exorcisms performed by Jesus as functioning to present Jesus as the one who battles against the enemies of God. On another level, however, these acts also function to present Jesus as the Holy One of God, empowered by the Holy Spirit of God, who encounters and subdues the unclean spirits. The unclean spirits were indeed considered the enemies of God for they stood allied to Satan. Moreover, these unclean spirits may have been considered strong sources of that which was impure.<sup>90</sup> Over against these spirits stands the Markan Jesus, the one who possesses the purity that is from God. Thus in warring against the enemies of God in the exorcism accounts, Jesus stands as the one who casts out the source of impurity which keeps these persons unclean.

The miracle of 1:40-45, where Jesus makes clean (καθαρίσθητι) a leper who has come to him requesting to be made clean (ἐὰν θέλῃς δύνασαι με καθαρίσαι), also presents Jesus as the one who brings God's cleansing. The man's request to be made clean presents the idea that his ultimate concern was not physical healing, but rather ritual cleansing.<sup>91</sup> The significance of this cannot be overlooked, for as one scholar has suggested, "Leprosy was regarded first of all as an impurity

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<sup>88</sup> See the excellent essay by Jerome H. Neyrey, "The Idea of Purity in Mark's Gospel," *Semeia* 35 (1986): 91-128.

<sup>89</sup> Cranfield, *Mark*, 105.

<sup>90</sup> Jacob Neusner, *The Idea of Purity in Ancient Judaism* (Leiden: Brill, 1973), 8.

<sup>91</sup> Witherington, *Mark*, 103.

par excellence, an abomination excluding from Israel, the people called to be clean and holy.”<sup>92</sup> Thus, in touching the man, Jesus exposes himself to that which is considered to be impure, and therefore, he runs the danger of defiling himself. But, as J. Pilch has suggested, the act of touching a leper was not guarded against out of the fear of contracting the disease. Rather, it was out of one’s obligation to remain pure.<sup>93</sup> Jesus, then, is presented here as crossing the boundary of purity and entering into the territory of impurity as the Holy One of God.<sup>94</sup> Yet as the Holy One of God he remains pure. Thus in the act of touching the man, Jesus is presented as the one through whom God’s power to cleanse is effected.<sup>95</sup>

This idea is further presented in the “sandwich” structured healing miracles of 5:21-43. In this pericope, Jesus is first confronted by Jairus who pleads for Jesus to come and heal his daughter who is ill. In the process of making his way there, however, a woman who has been bleeding for twelve years approaches Jesus, only to touch his robe, believing that this act will heal her. Jesus feels that “power” has come from him, and demands to know who touched him. After she comes to him, Jesus pronounces healing on the woman, thus not only healing her of the disease that plagues her, but also of the impurity that separates her from the community.<sup>96</sup> In the miracle story that brackets this cleansing, Jesus comes to Jairus’ house only to find the daughter already dead. Jesus, however, enters the house, takes the girl by the hand, again exposing himself to impurity<sup>97</sup>, and commands her to rise. Thus, not

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<sup>92</sup> Michal Wojciechowski, “The Touching of the Leper (Mark 1, 40-45) as a Historical and Symbolic Act of Jesus,” *BZ* ns 33 (1989): 118. See Lev 13:45; Num 12:10; 2 Kgs 5:27; 15:5.

<sup>93</sup> John L. Pilch, “Understanding Biblical Healing: Selecting the Appropriate Model,” *BTB* 18 (1988): 65.

<sup>94</sup> On boundaries within purity systems see Neyrey, “The Idea of Purity in Mark’s Gospel,” esp. 99-105.

<sup>95</sup> Wojciechowski (“The Touching of the Leper,” 118-119) comments that since leprosy was viewed as a punishment of God, when a leper was healed the healing was attributed to God.

<sup>96</sup> Marla J. Selvidge, “Mark 5:25-34 and Leviticus 15:19-20: A Reaction to Restrictive Purity Regulations,” *JBL* 103 (1984), 622n20. On this story in Luke, Joseph Fitzmyer (*Luke I-LX* (AB 28; Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1981), 747) states, “(daughter) is used to reassure her that she is now recognized as a part of Israel.”

<sup>97</sup> Neyrey, “Idea of Purity in Mark’s Gospel,” 108.

only does Jesus give her back her life, he also cleanses her of her impure state as a dead person.<sup>98</sup>

In each of the exorcisms, and in the accounts of cleansing the leper, healing the haemorrhaging woman, and raising from the dead the young girl, Jesus is presented as the Holy One of God, who is empowered by the Holy Spirit of God in order to bring God's cleansing to those who are viewed as impure. Purity and holiness were indeed important states of being for any Israelite, for they were based on God's own nature as holy (Lev 19:2). In crossing the boundaries of purity and entering into the territory of impurity, Jesus encounters the unclean. But in doing so, he himself is not made unclean. Rather he transfers to the unclean person the cleansing of God. He heals, cleanses, and reinstates the unclean to community.<sup>99</sup>

### *Jesus' Miracles and God's Compassion and Comfort*

At various points in the narrative the Markan Jesus is said to have compassion (σπλαγχνίζομαι; 1:41; 6:34; 9:22) on the plight of people in need.<sup>100</sup> This compassion compels him to act to alleviate their situations. Yet we need not limit our recognition of this fact only to the use of σπλαγχνίζομαι. This is particularly true if we understand Mark's narrative in light of Deutero-Isaiah.

<sup>98</sup> This is not to suggest that the focus of the miracle is a cleansing. Rather, the point here is to draw out the implied transference of purity to the young girl's body, which as a corpse remained unclean. See Hag 2:13. On the specific purity issues in these stories, see also Bruce Chilton, *Jesus' Baptism and Jesus' Healing* (Harrisburg, PA: Trinity Press, 1998), 64-69.

<sup>99</sup> On the sociological significance of purity see David A. deSilva, *Honor, Patronage, Kinship & Purity: Unlocking New Testament Culture* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2000), 283-285; Bruce J. Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 222-224.

<sup>100</sup> There is some difficulty in the original reading of σπλαγχνίζομαι in 1:41. While this reading occurs in a diverse number of important manuscripts (8 B L 892), the originality of ὀργισθεῖς presents the more difficult reading, which suggests a scribal alteration from ὀργισθεῖς to σπλαγχνίζομαι. However, given the minimal manuscript evidence for ὀργισθεῖς and the lack of a sufficient explanation for Jesus' anger towards the leper, it is better to accept σπλαγχνίζομαι as the original reading. For two differing views regarding this textual problem see Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 76 and Guelich, *Mark*, 72,74.

In our discussion of the presentation of God in Mark's prologue, we argued at some length the source of the conflation of scriptural passages Mark uses in 1:2-3. There we determined, following others, that Mark's designation of Isaiah as the source of the quotation may have been intended to focus the attention of his audience on the context of God's eschatological victory narrated in Isa 40. Part of this victory, however, comes in the comforting of God's people. Indeed the first verse of Isa 40 (LXX) commands that God's people be comforted, παρακαλεῖτε παρακαλεῖτε τὸν λαόν μου λέγει ὁ θεός. K. Snodgrass has stated that Isa 40:1-11 serves as the prologue of Isa 40-66, in which the theme of God's consolation and comfort are found throughout. Moreover, he comments, "Isaiah 40:1-5 quickly became for Judaism a classic expression of God's comfort and salvation."<sup>101</sup>

Given, then, this understanding of Isa 40, and its use in Mark to set the tone of his Gospel as narrating the eschatological victory of God in bringing salvation, we can suggest that the miracles performed by Jesus in Mark's narrative may be viewed within the framework of God's promised eschatological comfort for his people. This argument is strengthened when we consider two other significant factors. First, since Jesus is presented in 1:14-15 as the one who proclaims the gospel of God, the miracles performed by Jesus should also be understood as his actions that proclaim that gospel; again the miracles function as parables. Stuhlmacher has suggested that one of the primary texts for understanding the concept of εὐαγγέλιον is Isa 40:9.<sup>102</sup> There the herald of good tidings (ὁ εὐαγγελιζόμενος) is commanded to proclaim, "See your God." We have already seen how Mark portrays the in-breaking of God into the narrative, and also how Jesus is the one who proclaims that the kingdom of God is at hand, and calls on all to believe in the gospel of God. Against the background of Isa 40, then, Jesus is the one who not only proclaims the coming of God, but also acts for God in the bringing of comfort to God's people.

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<sup>101</sup> Klyne R. Snodgrass, "Streams of Tradition Emerging from Isaiah 40:1-5 and their Adaptation in the New Testament." *JSNT* 8 (1980): 24. Cf. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus*, 76-84.

<sup>102</sup> Peter Stuhlmacher, *Das paulinische Evangelium* (FRLANT, 95; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1968), 116-122.



A second and more particular factor may also support our understanding of the miracles in Mark as presenting Jesus as the one who brings God's comfort to his people. This is found in Mark's use of the verb παρακαλέω. The verb itself may simply mean to call on someone. Yet, it may also mean to call on another person for comfort. Given its place in Isa 40:1 (LXX) in the imperative form, we may suggest that Mark's use of it may hint at picturing Jesus as the one who brings God's eschatological comfort to his people. The verb is used by Mark to describe the way in which supplicants ask Jesus to heal them or another person (1:40; 6:56; 7:32; 8:22). In each case Jesus is called upon to use his power to comfort one or several who are ill. Thus those who come to Jesus for healing recognise the power of God in him to provide healing. Mark, however, may use these healing stories as purposely drawing the audience to understand Jesus as the one who brings eschatological comfort to God's people, reflecting the understanding of Isa 40:1-5.

Moreover, in Isa 40:11 God speaks of coming to his people as a shepherd to feed them.<sup>103</sup> This may shed light on Jesus' feeding miracles in 6:34-44 and 8:1-10. In both scenes Jesus has compassion (ἐσπλαγχνίσθη [6:34]; σπλαγχνίζομαι [8:2]) on the crowd, and in 6:34 his compassion is because (ὅτι) they are as sheep without a shepherd to feed them. Thus in the miracle of feeding the people, Jesus takes on the role of God as shepherd of the people who brings comfort to God's people.

Jesus' miracles, then, serve to demonstrate that God was fulfilling his promise of comfort for his people. Thus, Jesus' acts of compassion are within the context of God's promises to bring compassion. As Scot McKnight has commented in his recent study of the historical Jesus, "[Jesus] acted in compassion and worked to alleviate human need in order to show to Israel what God was doing for it."<sup>104</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Isa 40:11 (LXX): Ως ποιμὴν ποιμανεῖ τὸ ποίμνιον αὐτοῦ καὶ τῷ βραχίονι αὐτοῦ συναξει ἄρνας καὶ ἐν γαστρὶ ἐχούσας παρακαλέσει.

<sup>104</sup> McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 66.

*Jesus' Miracles and God's Judgment*

We have already discussed Jesus as the one who wars against the enemies of God in the exorcisms, and the sea-calming story. These acts certainly present the idea of God's judgement on these enemies. Yet, there is a sense in which the cursing of the fig tree stands as a miracle event that pronounces judgement on the temple establishment.<sup>105</sup> As we have pointed out in the previous chapter, the bracketing of the fig tree story around Jesus' action in the temple stands to give meaning to his action in the temple.<sup>106</sup> Thus, the miracle serves as a parable of the destiny of the temple. Jesus' pronouncement against the fig tree that no one will eat fruit from it again is made real in the narrative when Peter draws attention to the withered tree. This withered tree, then, stands as a symbolic judgement against Israel, who is often depicted as a fig tree in the prophetic tradition.<sup>107</sup> Mark, then, uses this nature miracle as a symbolic act, a parable, in which the miracle functions as presenting Jesus as the one who brings God's judgement on the temple.<sup>108</sup>

*Jesus' Miracles and God's Numinous Presence*

The motif of wonder in response to Jesus' teachings and miracles is frequent in Mark, and is expressed through various terms relating to fear, astonishment, or

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<sup>105</sup> For the view that Jesus' cursing of the fig tree is a nature miracle, see Rudolph Bultmann, *History of the Synoptic Tradition* (trans. John Marsh; New York: Harper & Row, 1963), 36, 218. Twelftree (*Jesus the Miracle Worker*, 91) has helpfully pointed out the significant differences in this miracle. It is the only miracle which brings destruction. It is the only miracle related directly to the temple. It is the last of Jesus' miracles in the Gospel.

<sup>106</sup> Jesus' actions here may be viewed along the same lines as the symbolic actions of the prophets (Isa 20:1-6; Jer 13:1-11; 19:1-13; Ezek 4:1-15). On this point see Lane, *Mark*, 400; Edwin K. Broadhead, *Teaching with Authority: Miracles and Christology in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 74; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 173n1. See also Deborah Krause, "Narrated Prophecy in Mark 11.12-21: The Divine Authorization of Judgment," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. C. A. Evans & W. R. Stegner; JSNTSup 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 235-246. Krause sees Jesus' actions towards the fig tree and the temple as expanding and transforming the prophecy of Hosea 9:10-17.

<sup>107</sup> Ben Witherington, *The Christology of Jesus* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 173. See Isa 34:4; Jer 8:13; 29:17; Hos 2:12; 9:10, 16; Joel 1:7; Mic 7:1-6.

<sup>108</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 400.

amazement.<sup>109</sup> Thus wonder is expressed through various words and forms of those words. These are: θαυμάζω, ἐξίστημι, φοβέομαι, ἐκπλήσσω, ἔκστασις, φόβος, θάμβος.<sup>110</sup> While it is true that Mark uses the phenomena of wonder outside the miracle stories, as Timothy Dwyer points out<sup>111</sup>, it seems that its inclusion within the miracles of Mark carries significance for the presentation of Jesus as personifying the numinous presence of God.

The responses of amazement, astonishment, or fear as a result of the miracles of Jesus in Mark's narrative are found in 1:22, 27; 2:12; 4:41; 5:15, 20, 33, 42; 6:50-51; and 7:37. In each case the respondents who have either witnessed Jesus' activity or the result of his miracle express the sense of the numinous. In the exorcism of 1:22-28, the crowd are not only said to be astonished (ἐξεπλήσσοντο) at the teaching of Jesus, but in response to his casting out of the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue, they are said to be amazed (ἐθαμβήθησαν). While it is true that they see the *teaching* of Jesus as that which has authority, it is the act of exorcism that seems to cause their amazement in 1:27. Again in 2:12, the crowd is said to be amazed (ἐξίστασθαι) at the healing and forgiving power of Jesus in healing the paralytic. Moreover, their acclamation of God's power in the healing and forgiveness given by Jesus (δοξάζειν τὸν θεόν), and their claim to have never

<sup>109</sup> Gerd Theissen, *Miracle Stories of the Early Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1983), 69.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.; Timothy Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 128; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 11; Blackburn, *Theios Aner and the Markan Miracle Traditions*, 226. See also G. Bertram, "θάμβος, κτλ.," *TDNT* III: 4-7; idem, "θαῦμα, κτλ.," *TDNT* III: 27-42. On fear in Mark see W. C. Allen, "Fear in St. Mark," *JTS* 48 (1946): 201-203 and Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark*, 86-92.

<sup>111</sup> Dwyer, *Motif of Wonder*, 12n8. My intention in this discussion is not to investigate wonder as a theme in Mark, but rather to see how the theme functions within the miracle stories in Mark's Gospel. Credit must be given to Dwyer for his narrative analysis of this motif within the entirety of Mark. I have relied on his insights for my purposes here. See also Martin Meiser, *Die Reaktion des Volkes auf Jesus: Eine redaktionskritische Untersuchung zu den synoptischen Evangelien* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1998). Meiser's work examines the theme of the reaction of people to Jesus in the synoptic Gospels. In Mark, he sees the reactions having an epiphanic and theological function. Cf. Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 150-152.

seen anything like this before, also serves to highlight their encounter with the divine.<sup>112</sup>

In 4:41 the audience finds the first reference to the astonishment of the disciples. In a miracle in which they are the only witnesses, and indeed the ones whom Jesus saves, these disciples see for themselves the power Jesus possesses, power to calm the wind and the waves.<sup>113</sup> The narrator tells the audience that in response to the calming of the storm the disciples “feared a great fear” (ἐφομήθησαν φόβον μέγαν).<sup>114</sup> Their fear is because they do not understand who this person is that is present with them in the boat. Their question, “τίς ἄρα οὗτός ἐστιν” is similar to the one expressed by the people in the synagogue in 1:27, “τί ἐστιν τοῦτο”<sup>115</sup>, and presents the idea that these disciples, like the witnesses of the exorcism in 1:22-27, are confronted with something that God alone can do, control the wind and the sea. Moreover, in their fear and questioning, they express their experience of the new revelation God is giving in and through his Son. The audience, aware that Jesus is the one who has authority from God, understands that Jesus is also the new revelation from God who astonishes even his closest followers.

The story of Jesus casting out the unclean spirits in 5:1-20 presents two different reactions that fall under a response of wonder. Yet, as Dwyer has helpfully pointed out, the response of wonder “is not directed at the exorcism itself.”<sup>116</sup> The response of 5:15 is from those who see the man restored, in his right mind. Their fear is over Jesus’ power to transform the man whom no one to this point could subdue. Thus what others could not do, Jesus, as the one filled with the power of

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<sup>112</sup> On acclamation as a response to miracles and its association with wonder see G. Theissen, *Miracle Stories*, 71-72. On the response of glory given to God as an indication that those who witnessed the healing understood the act as God’s act see Karl Kertelge, *Die Wunder Jesu im Markusevangelium* (Munich: Kösel, 1970), 81.

<sup>113</sup> Pesch (*Markusevangelium*, 1:269-70) identifies the sea-stilling miracle as a rescue miracle.

<sup>114</sup> Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (London: Macmillan, 1966), 276.

<sup>115</sup> Dwyer, *Motif of Wonder*, 110.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid.*, 115.

God, acts to demonstrate the new revelation of God by doing what could not have been done. The second response in 5:20 is in response to the proclamation of the once possessed man. His instructions from Jesus are to go and tell all that the Lord has done for him, and he carries out this proclamation. On hearing the message, and seeing the man who was once possessed by the evil spirits, “everyone” was amazed (ἐθαύμαζον). Clearly their amazement is a combination of seeing the man in a new state, and hearing how this was done. Thus, their wonder is directed at that which Jesus alone could do, and at the new revelation God was executing in Jesus.

The healing of the woman who touches Jesus’ garment, and the raising of the daughter of Jairus present two miracle stories structured through Mark’s “sandwiching technique.” Moreover, the two stories are also linked through a number of verbal and thematic similarities.<sup>117</sup> There are also in both stories reactions of wonder. In the healing of the woman of her perpetual bleeding, she alone is the one who responds in fear (φοβηθεῖσα; 5:33). Her fear, however, is not as a result of what Jesus may do to her, seeing that she has transgressed the law as a result of her touching Jesus. Rather, her fear is in knowing what had happened to her, knowing that she had been healed of her disease, and that she had experienced an encounter with divine power.<sup>118</sup> This, of course, is in light of her knowing, as well as the Markan audience, that doctors have failed to help her. The power that flows from Jesus, however, heals the woman of her disease. Knowing that he has healed her places the woman in a state of wonder as she comes and falls at his feet. Her fear is an echo of the fear that those who stand before God possess in the Old Testament.<sup>119</sup> Thus in experiencing divine healing from Jesus, contrasted with the failure of others to help her, the woman’s reaction may communicate her experience of God’s new revelation in Jesus.

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<sup>117</sup> See Kertelge, *Wunder*, 112.

<sup>118</sup> Craig A. Evans, “‘Who Touched Me?’ Jesus and the Ritually Impure,” in *Jesus in Context: Temple, Purity, Restoration* (ed. C. A. Evans & B. Chilton; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 368. See also Dwyer (*Motif of Wonder*, 118) who points out that the participle εἰδύλα should be taken as causal.

<sup>119</sup> See for example Gen 28:17; Exod 20:18; Judg 6:22-24. See also Marcus, *Mark 1-8*, 359.

Likewise, the raising of Jairus' daughter presents the onlookers, the mother, the father, and those with Jesus, with a sense of God's new revelation. The audience is set up for the newness of the experience when Jairus is asked why he should bother the teacher any further. The people indeed understood that no one could raise the dead. But Jesus' coming and his actions in raising the dead girl confront the witnesses with the new revelation that God was effecting through Jesus' miracle working power. Thus, they were overcome with amazement (ἐξέστησαν ἐκστάσει μεγάλη).

The scene of Jesus' walking on the sea (6:45-52) presents for a second time the fear of the disciples, and seems to be closely linked to the storm-stilling miracle of 4:41-45.<sup>120</sup> While it is true that Mark tells his audience that at the sight of the φάντασμα the disciples were disturbed (ἐταράχθησαν), Jesus' command to them, μὴ φοβεῖσθε, serves to demonstrate that their reaction to Jesus' walking on the water is similar to their reaction to his activity in stilling the storm. Thus, once again the audience finds a reaction of wonder on the part of those who witness Jesus perform the miraculous. The fear of the disciples, then, again functions to highlight their experience of the new revelation of God in the person of Jesus. Indeed, Jesus' intention to pass by them, and his words to them, ἐγώ εἰμι, may be viewed as allusions to God's self-revelation.<sup>121</sup>

The healing of the deaf mute in 7:31-37 presents not only the astonishment of the crowd, but also the most extensively narrated reaction of any persons to Jesus' miracles. Upon seeing Jesus open the man's ears and loosen his tongue, as well as hearing the man speak, the witnesses of the miracle are said to be astonished beyond measure (ὑπερπερισσῶς ἐξεπλήσσοντο). Their astonishment, again, can be

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<sup>120</sup> See John P. Heil, *Jesus Walking on the Sea: Meaning and Gospel Functions of Matt 14:22-33, Mark 6:45-52 and John 6:15b-21* (Rome: Biblical Institute Press, 1981), 127-131.

<sup>121</sup> See Heil (69-70) for an argument that Jesus' passing by is reflective of God's passing by in order to reveal himself to humans in the Old Testament (Ex. 33:18-34:6). On the use of ἐγώ εἰμι as an allusion to God's self-revelation in the Old Testament see Lane, *Mark*, 237; Bruggen, *Jesus the Son of God*, 96-97.



attributed to the experience of God's new revelation in Jesus' miracles. This is further presented to Mark's audience by the choral response in 37b. The response echoes what Isaiah spoke of when he prophesied that the ears of the deaf would be opened (Isa 35:5).<sup>122</sup> Thus, in this miracle, like the others where a response of marvel is narrated, Jesus is presented as the one who brings the new revelation of God.

Through this discussion of the miracles of Jesus in Mark, we have seen that the miracles function on several different levels to present Jesus in relation to God. In using the miracles in this way, then, Mark narrates his Christology as an aspect of his theology. In Jesus' actions, he acts for God. There is, however, another aspect of Jesus' activity in Mark which needs to be analysed in order to grasp the fullness of Mark's Christology as an aspect of his theology. It is, then, to the narrative presentation of Jesus as the teacher/preacher from/for God that we turn.

### Jesus as Speaker for God

The presentation of Jesus as preacher and teacher in Mark's Gospel is an obvious aspect of Mark's Christology. The public ministry of Jesus begins when he comes into Galilee preaching the gospel from/about God, and proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God. Moreover, his activity of teaching, as well as his being called teacher is narrated in 32 verses of Mark's Gospel.<sup>123</sup> The purpose and scope of the following discussion, however, will not be limited to places in the

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<sup>122</sup> Lane (*Mark*, 268) states, "The choral exclamation of the crowd is the response of faith which recognizes in all the works of Jesus the promised intervention of God."

<sup>123</sup> On Jesus as teacher see the following: S. Byrskog, *Jesus the Only Teacher* (Stockholm: Almqvist, 1994); Rainer Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer: Eine Untersuchung zum Ursprung der Evangelien-Überlieferung* (WUNT 7; Tübingen: Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 3<sup>rd</sup> edn., 1988); idem, "Jesus as Preacher and Teacher," in *Jesus and the Oral Gospel Tradition* (ed. H. Wansbrough; JSNTSup 64; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1991), 185-210; Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Paul J. Achtemeier, "He Taught them Many Things": Reflections on Marcan Christology," *CBQ* 42 (1980): 465-481; Richard J. Dillon, "As One Having Authority' (Mark 1:22): The Controversial Distinction of Jesus' Teaching," *CBQ* 57 (1995): 92-113; A. H. Howe, "The Teaching Jesus Figure in the Gospel of Mark: A Redaction-Critical Study in Markan Christology" (Ph.D. diss.; Northwestern University, 1978); PHEME PERKINS, *Jesus as Teacher* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

narrative where Jesus is specifically described as teaching or preaching. Rather, it is better to understand Jesus' words throughout the narrative as functioning to paint the portrait that I am arguing Mark paints. That picture is one which presents Jesus as speaker for God. Thus the following discussion will investigate the way in which Mark's presentation of Jesus' activity of speaking for God contributes to his placing his Christology within the framework of his theology.

*Jesus Speaks with Authority from God*

As we have consistently advocated, the baptismal scene functions in Mark as the point at which Jesus is given authority from God. We have already seen how this authority is evident in Jesus' miracle activity for God. What was expressed in that discussion may be reiterated here. With the opening of the heavens, the coming of the Spirit of God onto Jesus, and the voice of God pronouncing God's pleasure with Jesus as "my beloved Son", Jesus is in some way given authority to proclaim the gospel of God and the coming kingdom of God, as well as to speak authoritatively for God. What is interesting about this scene is that it also involves the only other character in the narrative who is given divine authority, John the Baptist. Yet in John's proclamation, he insists that the one who comes after him is the greater one (ὁ ἰσχυρότερός; 1:7). Thus, the divinely ordained messenger from God, John, sees his role as only secondary to God's true spokesman, Jesus.<sup>124</sup>

We remarked in our earlier discussion of the first miracle in Mark that the activity of Jesus in casting out the unclean spirit from the man in the synagogue is viewed by the crowd as authoritative teaching, "an act of divine power."<sup>125</sup> Mark is specific in pointing out, via the reaction of the crowd to Jesus' teaching, that Jesus' authority exceeds that of the scribes (1:27). This view of Jesus speaking with greater authority than his opponents runs throughout the narrative, and serves to show that

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<sup>124</sup> See Broadhead, *Naming Jesus*, 61-62.

<sup>125</sup> Ambrozic, *The Hidden Kingdom*, 84.

Jesus is endowed with authority from God.<sup>126</sup> The crowds see Jesus' teaching as *new* and their reactions to his words are characterised by the word group that describes wonder and amazement.<sup>127</sup> The teaching of Jesus' opponents, however, is presented as based on the authority of human tradition (7:8).<sup>128</sup> Therefore, from the narrative of Mark, we may follow Dillon's assessment that, "...the scribes' were brought forward at Mark 1:22 as teachers *without* 'authority,' not as 'authorities' of lesser degree."<sup>129</sup>

Jesus is also presented as the one who speaks with divine authority in relation to the demonic opponents. In two of the three scenes in which Jesus casts out an unclean spirit, Jesus commands these spirits to come out. In 1:25 Jesus commands the spirit, "Be silent, and come out of him." The narrator is certain not to leave doubts about Jesus' success or not unalleviated, as the audience is given the result of Jesus' command in 1:26. This is also seen in 9:25 where Jesus again commands the evil spirit to come out, and the spirit does exactly that. Moreover in Mark's summary of Jesus' exorcism activity in 3:11-12, Jesus is presented as ordering these spirits to stop making him known, indicating his authority, not only in casting them out, but in giving them commands.

One scene, however, seems to suggest that Jesus' authority over the demonic is in question. In the narration of the casting out of the Legion from the Gerasene Demoniac, the unclean spirits are presented as asking Jesus not to destroy them, but to cast them into a herd of swine.<sup>130</sup> The narrator tells the audience that Jesus "permitted" this request. Does this suggest to the audience that Jesus' authority over these unclean spirits is somehow less than what it should be? Mark's use of ἐπιτρέπω in 5:13 seems to suggest otherwise. The word here connotes the idea of a

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<sup>126</sup> Riesner, *Jesus als Lehrer*, 499. Sanders (*Jesus and Judaism*, 281) remarks, "But exegesis indicates that there were *specific issues* at stake between Jesus and the Jewish hierarchy, and that the specific issues revolved around a *basic question*: who spoke for God?"

<sup>127</sup> On the idea of wonder as a reaction to Jesus' words see Dwyer, *The Motif of Wonder*.

<sup>128</sup> Dillon, "'As One Having Authority,'" 103.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid.*, 112.

<sup>130</sup> On the demon's words being a defence against Jesus see Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 64.

person in authority permitting someone in lesser authority to do something they have requested. In Acts, the word is used to speak of the Roman authorities “permitting” Paul to do certain things, even though they had the authority to take other action (see Acts 21:39, 40; 26:1; 27:3; 28:16).<sup>131</sup> Therefore, Jesus is still presented as having a position of authority, which is brought out through his command that the spirits come out of the man. The concern of Mark is not that the spirits requested to be cast into the swine instead of out of the country. Rather, the narrative steers a straight course from Jesus’ command to the unclean spirits to come out of the man (5:8) to the spirits’ coming out (5:13). Thus, Jesus is presented in the exorcism scenes of Mark as having divine authority in his speech as he commands these spirits to do what he wants.<sup>132</sup>

Jesus’ words also carry authority greater than the words of those who follow him. This, of course, is brought out by the fact that Jesus is the one who calls them (1:16-20), and the one who gives them authority (3:13-19; 6:6b-13). Yet the transfiguration stands as the crucial scene that brings out Mark’s intention to show Jesus as the authoritative teacher above all characters in the narrative. There Jesus and the inner circle of the disciples are on the mountain, where Jesus is transfigured before them, and where both Elijah and Moses appear. Peter desires to build three tents, one each for Jesus, Elijah and Moses. Yet the voice from heaven speaks once again, this time to other characters in the narrative. The voice conveys to the disciples the confirmation that Jesus is the beloved Son, and commands them to listen to him (ἀκούετε αὐτοῦ). In doing so, the narrative implies that authority

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<sup>131</sup> G. Bouwman, “Ἐπιτρέπω,” in *Exegetical Dictionary of the New Testament* (ed. H. Balz & G. Schneide; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 2: 43-44.

<sup>132</sup> The scene in 7:24-30 in which the Gentile woman comes to Jesus to ask him to cast out of her daughter an evil spirit is the only scene in Mark in which Jesus does not personally confront the spirit and command the spirit to come out. Yet even in this case, Jesus’ words to the woman suggest that his authority in speech communicates his divine authority over unclean spirits. His words, “...the demon has left (ἐξελήλυθεν) your daughter.” (7:29), are followed by the result that the woman finds her daughter, but the demon is gone (ἐξεληλυθός). On similar stories of healings from a distance found in ancient literature see Twelftree, *Jesus the Exorcist*, 145-146.

has been given by God to the Son to speak on God's behalf. Thus, the divine voice once again gives authority to Jesus, this time specifically regarding what he *speaks*.

Two other points can be made concerning the presentation of Jesus' words as carrying divine authority. First, Jesus is presented as the authoritative exponent of Scripture. His quotation of Scripture seems to be done in order to demonstrate that his actions and words are to be viewed as the fulfilment of God's plan, in answer to a misinterpretation of Scripture on the part of others, or as a judgement against activity outside the will of God.<sup>133</sup> In so doing, Jesus is presented as asserting his own authority to use Scripture to support his activity and teaching as God's presence in the world. As Bruce Chilton has stated,

"...Jesus seems to have broken new ground, not in contemporizing scripture (which most intelligent preachers do), but in making God's present activity, not the text, his point of departure. The wealth and variety of biblical language and imagery in Jesus' sayings indicate that he did not use the circumstances of the present to explain the meaning of scripture; he rather used scripture to assert God's meaning for the present."<sup>134</sup>

A second indicator of Jesus' authority to speak for God in the narrative is brought out by his use of ἀμήν λέγω ὑμῖν. Jesus' use of this phrase occurs thirteen times in Mark (3:28; 8:12; 9:1,41; 10:15,29; 11:23; 12:43; 13:30; 14:9,18,25,30) and carries with it the idea that he himself speaks with the authority of God.<sup>135</sup> Thus, unlike the prophets who generally preface their statements with, "Thus says the Lord," the Markan Jesus is presented speaking with divine authority.

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<sup>133</sup> Ellis, remarking on Jesus' conflict with the Sadducees over the resurrection states, "...Jesus is not ascribing their theological error to ignorance of the words of the Bible but to a lack of understanding of its meaning." See E. Earle Ellis, *The Old Testament in Early Christianity* (WUNT54; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1991; repr. Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1992), 127, 130-138.

<sup>134</sup> Bruce Chilton, *A Galilean Rabbi and his Bible* (London: SPCK, 1984), 187.

<sup>135</sup> H. Schlier, "ἀμήν," *TDNT* I:335-338; Riesner, "Jesus as Preacher and Teacher," 209; J. D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975), 79; Raymond E. Brown, *An Introduction to New Testament Christology* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1994), 70; Marcus J. Borg, *Jesus A New Vision* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), 47; Joachim Jeremias, *New Testament Theology: The Proclamation of Jesus* (trans. John Bowden; New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), 35-36.

Instead of announcing that God speaks through him, the Markan Jesus speaks free of such a preface. Thus the authority of Jesus to speak for God is clear in Mark's presentation of Jesus.

*Jesus Speaks concerning the Kingdom of God and the Gospel of God*

Having established Jesus' God-given authority, and his initial proclamation of the kingdom of God and the gospel of God in the prologue, Mark narrates the remainder of Jesus' activity and words in relation to and deriving from this prologue. Jesus' teachings on forgiveness of sins (2:1-12; 3:28-29), the Sabbath (2:23-3:6), fasting (2:18-20), purity (2:15-17; 7:1-23), and the temple (11:15-19) are all related to the in-breaking of God's rule and the proclamation of the gospel of God. Moreover, as we have shown in the previous exegesis of Mark, Jesus' teaching on ethics is dependent on God's sovereignty, brought out particularly in 10:2-31.<sup>136</sup>

In his teaching in 10:2-31 Jesus bases his understanding of the sanctity of marriage in the sovereign intention of God at creation (2-12). Likewise, he teaches that to enter the kingdom of God, one must receive it like a child (10:13-16). This rule of God is equated with the eternal life the man of 10:17-22 seeks. As we argued in the previous discussion, Jesus' response to the man's declaration of Jesus as "good teacher," "No one is good except God alone," presents to the audience the understanding of God as the giver of the eternal life the man seeks. Yet, Jesus does offer to the man what is required in order to receive eternal life. He first points to the keeping of the commandments, to which the man replies, "I have kept all these since my youth." This response by the man opens the door for Jesus to speak authoritatively about what God is requiring in the *present*. While we cannot propose that Jesus requires as a normative ethic selling of one's property and giving the earnings to the poor, Jesus speaks authoritatively about what God requires from *this* wealthy man. The larger issue at hand is Jesus' authority to command what God

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<sup>136</sup> On the ethical emphasis of this section of Mark see Dan O. Via, *Ethics of Mark's Gospel-In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985).



requires. Thus the in-breaking of God's rule and the proclamation of the gospel of God establish a new theological ethic for the present that extends beyond the keeping of the law. The requirement is obedience to the will of God revealed primarily in the present authority of Jesus.

This is also evident in Jesus' response to the questioning he faces in Mark 12. Of particular interest is Jesus' response regarding the greatest commandment. A scribe, seeing that Jesus answered the other questions well, also asks Jesus a question (12:28). The subject of his question is the identification of the first commandment (ἐντολὴ πρώτη πάντων). Of course the response of Jesus is not surprising, for he quotes the core of Jewish faith, the *Shema*. What is unforeseen in Jesus' response to the man, however, is his inclusion of a *second* (δευτέρα αὕτη) commandment. While the man asked only for the first, possibly looking for Jesus to answer wrongly<sup>137</sup>, Jesus thwarts the expectation of the man by also giving him the second commandment, requiring one to love of one's neighbour. Jesus, as the authoritative preacher of the present rule of God, which establishes a new ethic in which love of God and love of neighbour amount to the same requirement, extends the man's comprehension of God's present demands. Thus, the words of Jesus, like the miracles of Jesus, demonstrate that God's rule is at hand. Moreover, Jesus' words also establish the meaning of the gospel of God, and refocus ethical behaviour that is centred in the sovereignty of God.<sup>138</sup>

### *Jesus Speaks about Himself as Envoy of God*

Important for the audience's understanding of the presentation of Jesus is how the Markan Jesus speaks of himself and his role as the one sent from God. We are not here concerned with the titles Jesus uses to describe himself, for we have previously discussed these. Our concern is what Jesus says about his mission from

<sup>137</sup> On the possible ways to understand the intentions of the scribe see van Iersel, *Mark*, 377-378.

<sup>138</sup> See Donahue, "Neglected Factor," 570-581.

God. First, Jesus speaks of his mission in parables. In 2:19-20 Jesus calls himself the bridegroom who will be taken away. His use here of the passive ἄπαρθῆ, most likely a reference to the future death of Jesus, implicates God's activity in that death.<sup>139</sup> In the parable of the sower, Jesus is probably understood to be the one who sows the word.<sup>140</sup> In the parable of the Wicked Tenants he implies himself to be the beloved son of the vineyard owner who comes to collect what is rightfully the owner's, but is killed by the tenants. Moreover, he describes himself as the stone that, having been rejected, has been made the chief corner stone, by the Lord's power. Thus, in each parable in which Jesus speaks of himself, his mission, death and exaltation are linked to God.

A second feature brought out by Mark's presentation of Jesus' teaching about himself has to do with his understanding that in confessing and following him, people were being obedient to God, and thus recipients of the eschatological reward given by God.<sup>141</sup> In 8:27-38 Peter, who misconceives what Jesus' messiahship entails, confesses Jesus as the Messiah. Jesus teaches that he will die. He calls all who want to become his disciples to take up the cross and follow him. He further defines discipleship as loosing one's life for his sake and the sake of the gospel (ἐνεκεν ἑμοῦ καὶ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου). The one who does this is promised salvation (σώσει αὐτήν). Those who are ashamed of him and his words (με καὶ τοὺς ἑμούς λόγους) however, of them he will be ashamed when he comes in the glory of the Father. Thus, the obedience and faithfulness of the disciple to Jesus in this world, designated as an adulterous and sinful generation, determines the outcome of the eschatological judgement in the presence of God, expressed by Jesus' use of

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<sup>139</sup> See Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:1471; Vincent Taylor, *Jesus and his Sacrifice* (London: Macmillan and Co., LTD., 1937), 82-85.

<sup>140</sup> On this see especially Mary A. Tolbert, *Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary- Historical Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989), 127-175.

<sup>141</sup> Larry W. Hurtado, *One God, One Lord: Early Christian Devotion and Ancient Jewish Monotheism* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1998), 116.

πατρός, with the holy angels.<sup>142</sup> Thus, the faithfulness of the disciple in following and confessing Jesus is presented, through Jesus' words, as expressing obedience to God, and determines the outcome of the eschatological judgement in which the Son will give testimony to the Father.

This is further presented in 9:30-50, where the receiving of a child is likened to receiving Jesus, which in turn is receiving the one who sent Jesus. Moreover, in answer to John's complaint about the one casting out demons and who was not following them, Jesus assures John that those who offer service to followers of Jesus, because they bear the name of Christ, will not lose the reward, certainly a reference to the eschatological reward. Lane is right to point out that this does not mean that in merely giving a cup of water one gains a reward. Rather, it means that, "faith and obedience, shown in devotion to Jesus... call forth the approval of God."<sup>143</sup>

The discussion of eternal life prompted by the question of the man who had many possessions, also serves to present Jesus as teaching that following him is obedience to God. The man seeks to gain eternal life, and Jesus seeks to show him how he may gain it. His first requirements are answered in the positive, as the man assures Jesus that he has kept the commandments. Yet, when Jesus calls the man to sell all he has and follow him, the man turns away. Jesus tells his disciples that it is difficult for the person of wealth to enter the kingdom of God, but assures them that salvation is an act of God, with whom nothing is impossible (26-27). It is Peter's words in v28 about the disciples' commitment to Jesus that bring the point to a head. Jesus assures him that anyone who leaves all for his sake and the sake of the gospel (ἐνεκεν ἑμοῦ καὶ ἐνεκεν τοῦ εὐαγγελίου; cf. 8:35) will receive in the age to come eternal life (30). The giver of this eternal life, however, must be viewed as

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<sup>142</sup> On the syntactical importance of the parallelisms in vv. 35-91 see F. Neirynck, *Duality in Mark: Contributions to the Study of Markan Redaction* (Leuven: Leuven University Press, 1972), esp. 79, 103, 104, 107, 109, 134, and H. J. de Jonge, "The Sayings on Confessing and Denying Jesus in Q 12:8-9 and Mark 8:38," in *Sayings of Jesus: Canonical and Non-Canonical* (ed. W.L. Petersen, et. al.; Leiden: Brill, 1997), 117.

<sup>143</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 345. On Jesus' teaching regarding rewards for obedience see McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 233-236.

God, and therefore, God rewards those who leave all to follow Jesus and proclaim the gospel.

The final pericope that presents Jesus as speaking of faithfulness to him as determinative of the eschatological judgement before God is found in 13:9-13. Here, as we discussed in the previous chapter, Jesus is predicting that the disciples will undergo persecution because of his name. However, it is of divine necessity (δεῖ) that the gospel be preached (10). Thus the threat for the disciples is large to the extent that even family members will betray them. The hatred against them will come because of Jesus' name (διὰ τὸ ὄνομά μου). In his last statement regarding this persecution, Jesus assures his disciples that the one who endures to the end, i.e. the one who remains faithful to his name and the gospel message, will be saved (13:13). Again, the act of salvation is God's act, signified by the passive σωθήσεται, which is given to those who remain faithful to Jesus. Thus Jesus teaches that faithfulness in following him is obedience to God that will be rewarded by God. Therefore, as the one sent by God, Jesus claims for himself the place of representative for God, in whom followers of him gain reward, salvation, and eternal life from God.

Regarding the words spoken by Jesus concerning himself in relation to God, we must now turn our attention to examining briefly those statements that seem to function as presenting Jesus as subordinate to God. As Donahue points out, however, these statements function to present "a proper understanding of the relation of Jesus to God."<sup>144</sup>

The first of these statements we have already examined for other purposes, but it will benefit our discussion if we return briefly to it once again. Mark 9:37 as we have already pointed out presents Jesus as the one sent from God, thus as the one who has authority from God as God's representative. In stating the relationship in these terms, Jesus also presents himself as the one whose role is subservient to God.

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<sup>144</sup> Donahue, "Neglected Factor," 590.

The Markan Jesus does not claim to be God, but only the authoritative representative of God. This is further highlighted through Jesus' initial answer to the man calling him "good teacher" in 10:17. We argued in the previous chapter that Jesus' response in 10:18, which diverts the designation of good applied to himself to being applicable only to God, might reflect an Old Testament theme of God's goodness in giving good things, such as the eternal life the man seeks.<sup>145</sup> This is supported in the narrative by Jesus' words concerning the future salvation of all, and the rewards that will be given. Jesus views the future salvation of the faithful to be given by God (10:28-31; 13:9-13). Indeed, Jesus' own exaltation is done by the power of God.

Explicitly related to this idea of the eschatological authority, are the words Jesus speaks to James and John in response to their request for seats on his right and left when Jesus comes in his glory (10:35-45). Jesus makes no claim to having authority to grant them what they want. Indeed, he again points to God as the sole authority who has prepared (ἡτοιμασται), a divine passive, these seats, and as the one who has the authority to give these seats (10:40).<sup>146</sup>

It is this understanding of God's authority that leads Jesus to state the Son's ignorance as to the time when the eschatological event will take place (13:32). Clearly Jesus associates himself with God via the linking of the Son with the Father. In his statement, however, Jesus again submits to the authority of God concerning events of the future. Jesus does not presume to designate a time or to have

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<sup>145</sup> Marcus argues that Jesus' question is more than a rhetorical one. He states, "The Markan Jesus, in other words, is challenging the man to attain a christological insight, the realization that Jesus is good because God is good, and that Jesus as the Son of God, the earthly representative of the heavenly king, and the one indwelt by God's name, participates in the goodness of God's reign and manifests it eschatologically upon the earth." See Joel Marcus, "Authority to Forgive Sins upon the Earth: The *Shema* in the Gospel of Mark," in *The Gospels and the Scriptures of Israel* (ed. C. A. Evans & W. R. Stegner; JSNTSup 104; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 208 I am inclined to accept Marcus' understanding of the question by Jesus with caution. It seems to me that in asking the question Jesus is directing the man to the true giver of eternal life, God. In doing so, Jesus is not downplaying his own identity and significance as the Son of God who participates in the eschatological reign of God. Rather he is recognising God's authority as the "Good One" who gives eternal life.

<sup>146</sup> Donahue, "Neglected Factor," 590.

knowledge of the time when “these things” will occur. Rather, he is presented through his statement in 13:32 as the faithful son who points to the father, God, as the one who has both the knowledge and authority of the time.<sup>147</sup>

In and through these statements of Jesus concerning his authority in relation to God’s authority, Mark presents his portrait of Jesus as the Son who is faithful and submissive to the Father. The intention of this, as Schweizer points out, may be to guard against a misunderstanding by the audience that may view Jesus as another God.<sup>148</sup> Mark’s intention, however, is to show both Jesus’ inseparability from God and his role as the faithful and submissive son of the Father.

This extensive analysis of Jesus’ statements in the Markan narrative has sought to demonstrate that Mark intends to present Jesus as the authoritative teacher and preacher from God, who preaches the coming of God’s rule. In his proclamation and teaching, Jesus’ authority is seen as supreme to all others. In fact, one may even suggest that in light of Jesus’ authority in the narrative, other characters have no authority. The content of his teaching is focused on the in-breaking reign of God, and the ethics that are associated with that reign. Moreover, through his teaching the Markan Jesus is presented as the one people are to follow to live in obedience to God. His authority, however, is not fully equal with God. Rather, through some of his statements, Jesus is presented as the faithful Son who is submissive to the Father and who points to God as the ultimate authority in the narrative, especially regarding the eschatological time and event of salvation. There remain, however, two sayings made by the Markan Jesus that require attention in order to highlight the meaning and significance of Jesus’ death as a act for God.

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<sup>147</sup> See Lane, *Mark*, 482, who remarks, “From this perspective the parousia is not conditioned by any other consideration than the sovereign decision of the Father, which remains enveloped with impenetrable mystery.”

<sup>148</sup> Schweizer, *Mark*, 282.



### Jesus' Death as an Act for God

As we demonstrated in our discussion of the passion predictions in Mark, Jesus teaches that his own fate, his suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation are all part of the divine plan, and are themselves dependent on the activity and faithfulness of God. Space prevents us from repeating completely Jesus' teaching concerning his death, which we analysed sufficiently in the two previous chapters. In summary of our analysis there, however, we can remind ourselves that Jesus determines that his death is of the divine will, indicated through the use of  $\delta\epsilon\iota$  and the use of the phrase "it is written". Moreover, following many scholars we suggested that the use of  $\piαραδίδωμι$  in the passive implies God's activity in the handing over of Jesus for death. Likewise, Jesus speaks of his resurrection within these contexts, and these references must be taken to imply Jesus' understanding of his resurrection as an act God. Of particular importance for gaining an understanding of the meaning and significance of Jesus' death in Mark's Gospel, however, it will be beneficial to discuss two sayings by the Markan Jesus regarding his death: the ransom saying and the saying at the Passover meal.

#### *The Ransom Saying*

The authenticity and meaning of Jesus' ransom saying in Mark 10:45 has been scrutinised by many New Testament scholars and theologians. While important questions revolve around the historicity of this saying, the scope of our investigation limits us to grasping only the meaning of the saying within the context of Mark's Gospel.<sup>149</sup> The saying stands in the context of Jesus' teaching on true service and discipleship. Indeed, one intention of the narrative context is to show that Jesus is

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<sup>149</sup> On the unity but secondary nature of Mk 10:45 see Pesch, *Markusevangelium*, 2:162-164. For a view arguing for the authenticity of the saying see Peter Stuhlmacher, "Existenzstellvertretung für die Vielen: Mk 10,45 (Mt 20,28)," in *Werden und Wirken des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1980), 412-427.

the supreme example of service, the true servant.<sup>150</sup> He is presented in contrast to James and John, who seek to rule when Jesus comes in his glory. Yet, despite the theme of service and discipleship being at the fore of the pericope of 10:32-45, the significance of Jesus' death is also highlighted through the words of Jesus given at the beginning and end of this passage. Moreover, as in his other statements in which he speaks of his having come, Jesus speaks here of the mission for which he has been sent by God. Thus the christological significance of the saying is not enveloped in the teaching of discipleship to the detriment of theology. Rather, as Jesus has spoken both of his being handed over in terms which imply God's activity, as well as God's sovereignty in the giving of seats on the right and left of Jesus, so in the saying of 10:45, Jesus implies that his death has theological significance in the strictest sense of the word.

This idea of the *theo*-logical significance, or theological meaning of the death of Jesus, is supported by the observation that the ransom saying comes at the climactic point of the passion predictions.<sup>151</sup> Indeed, the very details of Jesus' impending death and the emphasis on Jerusalem as the place where Jesus and his disciples are going (10:33) may function to demonstrate Mark's intention to call the audience to listen carefully to these words. Moreover, it is important to notice that the pattern of 10:32-45 is somewhat different from that of 8:33-9:1 and 9:30-50 in that in neither of these two passages does Jesus return to speak of his death. In 10:45, however, the narrator presents Jesus as giving a new understanding of his death, one that defines the purpose of his death.<sup>152</sup> In doing so, he calls his audience to consider Jesus' death as an act not only willed by God, but also as an act for God,

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<sup>150</sup> William M. Swartley (*Israel's Scripture Traditions and the Synoptic Gospels* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1994), 114n56) is right to state that, "Mark connects discipleship and atonement." However, at this point in the discussion, we are not addressing the discipleship question. Rather our focus is upon Mark's Christology. The theme of discipleship will be taken up in the following chapter.

<sup>151</sup> On the importance of this progression in the passion predictions in Mark see Norman Perrin, "The Creative Use of the Son of Man Traditions by Mark," in *A Modern Pilgrimage in New Testament Christology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974), 92.

<sup>152</sup> Witherington, *Mark*, 290.

on behalf of the many.<sup>153</sup> For the first time in Mark's Gospel, then, the audience is presented with the Markan Jesus' understanding of what his death means.

It is clear from Jesus' words about his death that he understands his death to be for others (ἀντὶ πολλῶν).<sup>154</sup> This may be seen in contrast to the disciples who are to give their lives for Jesus' sake and the sake of the gospel. Thus, Jesus' death is set out as the ultimate sacrifice, signified by the contrast (ἀλλὰ) he makes between the reason for which he did not come and why he did come. Yet in being a death for others, it must be understood also in terms of a ransom (λύτρον) for God. The idea of ransom is certainly foreign to modern minds as is evident from some theological interpretations and positions regarding Jesus' death. Yet, the concept of sacrifice and ransom is not foreign to the ancient world, or the Hebrew Bible. In presenting Jesus' saying that his death is given as a ransom on behalf of many, then, Mark asks his listeners to draw from extra-textual information that helps to define precisely what the words of Jesus mean.

As we have argued previously, following several other scholars, Mark presents his gospel, using the quotation from scripture at the beginning, as the new Exodus present in Deutero-Isaiah. Moreover, in the very words of Jesus here in Mark 10:45, several scholars have determined that Jesus understands his death as prefigured by the suffering servant of Isaiah 53. Specifically in the background of Jesus' words is Isa 53:10-12, where the servant's suffering is done by the will of the Lord, and on behalf of many (πολλοῖς). Thus, with this image in the background of the audience's minds, Mark presents Jesus' act of giving his life as a ransom (λύτρον) on behalf of many (ἀντὶ πολλῶν) as an act which accords with the will of God. In being a ransom in the place of many, Jesus' death is viewed here as that which is done in service not only to the many, but also in service to God. Jesus is

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<sup>153</sup> de Jonge (*God's Final Envoy*, 25) pertinently comments, "Wherever the concept of Jesus' death for others is found, it is spoken of as having brought a definitive change in the relationship between God and those who belong to Jesus."

<sup>154</sup> On the Semitic background of "for many" conveying the idea of "all" see Joachim Jeremias, *The Eucharistic Words of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 179.

viewed as both servant of the many, and servant of God. He freely offers his death in obedience to the will of God, as an act for God that ransoms the many. Indeed, at this point in the narrative Jesus states very clearly that the purpose of his coming is to give (δοῦναι) his life for many. Thus in offering himself on behalf of others, Jesus fulfils his purpose in being sent by God. The force of this offering within the narrative structure of Mark, in which, as we have suggested, God has entered on the way of victory, is the act which, although bringing suffering to the Son of God, brings victory to and for God. In the earlier encounters of Jesus and the demonic enemies of God, Jesus acts with authoritative power to overthrow them. Yet, the absence of any encounter with these demonic forces after the saying of 10:45, suggests that the victory of God over the demonic enemies of God will now come because of the faithful death of the Son; a death that serves as a ransom for those under the rule of God's enemies.<sup>155</sup>

### *The Passover Meal Saying*

Closely in line with this understanding of the Markan Jesus' words in 10:45 concerning his death is the saying which he speaks at the Passover meal in Mark 14:22-25.<sup>156</sup> The presence of πολλῶν in 14:23, and the idea that the cup (ποτήριον, a link with 10:38-39) is his blood which is being poured out for many, not only presents a word link between the two sayings, but a link of ideas, that is Jesus giving his life. Yet the idea of covenant introduced in Jesus' saying presents the Markan audience with further information about how the Markan Jesus understands his approaching death. Jesus is thus presented as speaking of his death as an act which he carries out in obedience to God, and as an act of God that

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<sup>155</sup> Of course the problem with the idea of ransom is that there is no clear indication as from what the many are ransomed. Many Biblical scholars and theologians alike have suggested various proposals. Within the context of Mark's Gospel, however, we may suggest that Jesus' miracle activity gives clues to answering this question, after all the crucifixion of Jesus in Mark's narrative may be viewed as the supreme miracle performed by Jesus. If so, then, we are presented with the idea that the many are ransomed from the demonic forces, sin, impurity, disease, and death.

<sup>156</sup> See Kim, "The 'Son of Man'" as the Son of God, 43-45.

establishes a new covenant between God and the people of God.<sup>157</sup> Moreover, since Jesus interprets his death as establishing the new covenant between God and his people, his statement concerning his not drinking until he does so in the kingdom of God, serves to present his death and resurrection as that which will usher in God's final rule.<sup>158</sup> His abstinence, then, may be due in part to his desiring to celebrate the coming rule of God with the people of God in the eschatological banquet, an event precipitated by his death. Thus, as in the ransom saying of 10:45, Jesus is presented in the Passover meal as speaking about his death in terms of an act for God.<sup>159</sup>

These two statements by the Markan Jesus detailing the meaning of his death move the audience to incorporate the divine activity and will in the death of Jesus, along with the divine purpose for that death, and the obedience of Jesus in fulfilling that purpose. This is highlighted by the placement of these two sayings, at crucial points in the narrative. Mark 10:45, as we have pointed out, comes after the climatic prediction by Jesus about his death. The saying over the cup and bread takes place just before Jesus is handed over. Moreover, Jesus' use of the verb διακονέω in 10:45, a word also carrying the meaning of serving at a table<sup>160</sup>, is reflected in his action of serving the disciples at the table during their last meal together. Thus in examining these two statements within the narrative-theological framework of Mark's Gospel, we find that Jesus is presented as the true servant of God, who freely

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<sup>157</sup> While the textual evidence weighs toward the non-originality of τῆς καινῆς (See Metzger, *Textual Commentary*, 113), as Kim (*The Son of Man as the Son of God*, 62) states, "... a covenant established by Jesus' blood can only be a 'new covenant', different from the Mosaic one." Cf. Witherington, *Mark*, 374.

<sup>158</sup> For a discussion of the relationship between Jesus' suffering and death and the kingdom of God see McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 115-118. Marinus de Jonge ("Mark 14:25 Among Jesus' Words about the kingdom of God," in *Saying of Jesus*, 123-135) argues that in Jesus' words of 14:25 there is no mention of resurrection, exaltation, or parousia. Thus, all that can be inferred from this saying is that Jesus will be present at the eschatological banquet. While I would agree with his cautious understanding, I would also point out that within the context of Jesus speaking of his death, the resurrection must be in view (cf. Davis, "Truly this Man was the Son of God," 124), which indeed must be followed by the exaltation and parousia.

<sup>159</sup> McKnight, *A New Vision for Israel*, 117, following Chilton's suggestion that in the meal Jesus presents himself and his meal as an alternative to the sacrificial system, states, "In other words, he offered himself as a sacrificial victim to God so that God would forgive the sins of Israel and restore the nation."

<sup>160</sup> BAGD, 184.

gives his life as a sacrifice of God on behalf of others. He chooses to do so because he understands that it is the will of God that he fulfils the purpose of God in being both the ransom for many, and the one through whom the new covenant between God and God's people is established.

As we argued throughout the analysis of the presentation of God in Mark's Gospel, the hand of God in the death of Jesus is explicitly present. Here, in this discussion of the meaning and significance of Jesus' death, we have sought to highlight the purpose of the death as an act by which the people of God are ransomed, and a new covenant is established between God and the people of God. Thus Jesus is presented as freely giving his life away in obedience to the will of God, in order to fulfil the purpose of God. Yet, the overall theological intention of the narrative is that redemption and salvation are God's initiative and purpose, and Jesus is presented as the one through whom these are accomplished.<sup>161</sup>

### **Jesus' Vindication and Exaltation as an Act of God**

We turn now to discuss briefly Jesus' vindication and exaltation as an act of God. We have already drawn attention to the resurrection of Jesus as that which is done by God's power. Again, though Jesus uses the active verb ἀναστῆναι in 8:31 and ἀναστήσεται in 9: 31 and 10:34, because he has already spoken of his death as that which God wills, and implies it as that in which God participates, the audience understands the act of Jesus' resurrection as that which is done by God. This, of course, is brought out clearly in Jesus' statement to the disciples in 14:28 when he tells them that after he has been raised he will go before them to Galilee. Jesus' use here of the passive ἐγερθῆναι certainly implies that he understands his resurrection to happen by an act of God. Moreover, the young man who meets the women at the tomb echoes this understanding through his use of ἡγέρθη (16:6).

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<sup>161</sup> See Arland J. Hultgren, *Christ and His Benefits: Christology and Redemption in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 62-63.



Added to this understanding of Jesus' vindication, as that which God does is the presentation of Jesus' exaltation as an act of God. Jesus speaks of his exaltation at several points in the narrative, although it is presented in cloaked language. The predominant characteristic of these sayings is that in them Jesus uses the reference Son of Man. We have already discussed the use of this title in reference to Jesus, and concluded that the consistency of its presence in the narrative is found in its reference to Jesus. The audience knows who the Son of Man is, and easily identify this person to be Jesus. Thus when Jesus speaks of the exaltation of the Son of Man the Markan audience knows that Jesus speaks of his own exaltation.

In each of these sayings, however, there is included language that is used either to refer explicitly to God's activity or to imply God's presence in this act of exaltation. In 8:38, Jesus speaks of the Son of Man coming in the glory of his father (πατρός αὐτοῦ), a reference to God. In this verse Jesus implies his role as that which gives testimony before God concerning the faithfulness of his followers. But the image of God's eschatological glory, and Jesus' presence with God and the holy angels, looks past the event of the cross to the time when Jesus is exalted at God's right hand.

The presence of God is also narrated in 13:24-26, where the audience hears the Markan Jesus describe the future coming of the Son of Man. The light-bearers in the sky will be darkened, as the sky itself is made black to allow the glory of the coming Son of Man to be visible to all. The implied actor in this coming is God, in that the darkening of the sun and moon, and the casting down of the stars are done by the Creator, God. Moreover, the coming of the Son of Man on clouds and in glory presents the audience with God's presence and activity. This is brought out even more specifically in 14:62, where again Jesus speaks of the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven, this time however, telling the high priest that he will see the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of *the Power*, a circumlocution for God.<sup>162</sup> This picture of the Son of Man sitting at the right hand of God triggers in the audience's

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<sup>162</sup> Lane, *Mark*, 537; Taylor, *Mark*, 568.

minds the statement made by Jesus in 12:36 when he speaks of David's words concerning the Messiah. The Messiah is the Lord who will be exalted at the right hand of the κύριος. Again, Jesus is the figure in Mark who is identified as the Messiah (Cf. 1:1). Thus, here also Jesus' exaltation must be viewed as that which God does for Jesus.

The presentation of the vindication and exaltation of Jesus in Mark's Gospel is focused on God's power and presence. As God is the one who both wills and participates in the handing over of Jesus to death, a death in which Jesus accomplishes the purpose of God, so God is viewed in the narrative as the faithful Father of the obedient Son. His actions for Jesus will bring about exaltation and triumph.

### **Mark's Christology as an aspect of Mark's Theology**

This chapter has demonstrated how Jesus is presented in relation to the presentation of God in Mark's Gospel. The narrator uses the art of telling the audience who Jesus is through the use of titles, and the art of showing the audience who Jesus is through the narrative presentation of Jesus' deeds, teachings, death, vindication and exaltation. It will be beneficial at this point to draw some succinct conclusions.

*First, as God is presented in the narrative as the authenticator of Jesus, so Jesus is presented as the authoritative actor and speaker for God.* Jesus is clearly presented as the one sent from God. Moreover, his miracle working activity, as we have seen, must be understood in light of the coming of God's rule. As suggested in the previous discussion, certain themes and characteristics exist in the miracle stories that serve to highlight Jesus as acting on behalf of God. Regarding Jesus as speaker for God, we have also demonstrated how Jesus speaks with authority from God, and presents himself in relation and submission to God. His teaching is focused on the coming rule of God, and the actions required by all who wish to be part of that rule. Moreover, via some of his sayings and actions, Jesus is clearly presented as standing in place of and on behalf of God. Those who desire to participate in the coming

kingdom must meet the requirements voiced by Jesus, and indeed must recognise Jesus as the authoritative envoy of God. Thus through his actions and words, Jesus is presented as the one who is authenticated by God. Indeed, God is the only one who can and does authenticate Jesus in Mark's narrative.

*Second, and closely related to the first, as God is presented as the commissioner of Jesus, so Jesus is presented as the suffering servant of God.* Jesus is clearly presented in Mark as understanding the task for which he has been sent. Although he does view his miracle activity, as well as his preaching and teaching as commissioned by God, it is ultimately his suffering and death which are understood in the narrative as the primary purpose for his coming. Through the narrative presentation of Jesus' suffering and death, as well as the Markan Jesus' words concerning his death, the audience is presented with the clear portrayal of God as the one who acts to bring this death about for God's purposes. It is God's will that Jesus suffer, God who ultimately stands behind the "handing over" of Jesus, and God who abandons Jesus to death. Jesus, however, is not to be viewed here as a character without freedom of choice, for he freely and intentionally gives his life away, submitting to the will of the Father.<sup>163</sup> Nor does this portrayal of God's hand and purpose in the death of Jesus downplay the culpability of humans for the death of Jesus. The narrative makes plain the human involvement through both the presentation of Judas as the betrayer, and the opponents of Jesus as the ones who put him to death. Still, the intention of this presentation is to highlight God as the ultimate authority in the narrative, particularly in relation to Jesus' death. Thus the audience understands that the human opponents of Jesus, including Judas, serve the purposes of God in bringing about the death of the Son. For it is only through the death of the Son that the divine purpose of ransoming many, and establishing the new covenant is brought about. Thus, God is presented as the commissioner of Jesus, and Jesus is presented as the suffering servant of God, who is obedient to that commission.

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<sup>163</sup> As Tódt (*The Son of Man*, 221) concludes, "He is not thrust into disaster unawares, but, still retaining his *exousia*, he goes and finishes his course under the power of darkness."

*Finally, as God is presented as the vindicator and exalter of Jesus, so Jesus is presented as the risen and glorified Son of God.* The resurrection of Jesus is no surprise in the Markan narrative; Jesus clearly speaks of it. In each setting it follows on the prediction of his death, and is thus tied to the activity and will of God. Moreover, the specific use of the divine passive ἐγερθῆναι by Jesus in 14:28, and ἡγέρθη by the young man at the tomb, are intended to focus the audience's attention onto God as the one, the only one, who can and does raise and vindicate Jesus. Thus in God's faithfulness to the Son, God conquers the enemies of humanity, death, and evil, and thereby vindicates the Son.

Moreover, as the Son of Man, who is the Son of God, Jesus envisions his final vindication as that which God accomplishes. His testimony before the Father and the angels (8:38) implies his authority given to him via his vindication by the Father. He is the one who is the Messiah, who as David's Lord sits at the right hand of the Lord, as this Lord places the enemies of the Messiah under his feet (12:26). Moreover, his victory is pictured as a cosmic event which brings about the shake-up of the heavens, in which he takes his authoritative position over the angels, sending them forth to gather the elect of God (13:24-27). The enemies of the Messiah, the Son of the Blessed One, will witness this event, as the Son of Man is exalted to the right hand of the Power (14:62). Thus, through a number of images implying the presence and activity of the divine, Jesus' final vindication is presented as that which God achieves.

Through the genre of narrative Mark presents a portrait of Jesus that is understood as an aspect of the narrative's portrait of God. God plays the main role in the narrative being the sender, authenticator, commissioner, and vindicator of Jesus. Jesus is presented in terms reflecting this presentation of God. He is presented as the one sent from God, the one who has authority to act and speak for God, the one who gives his life in obedience to the commission from God, and the one who is vindicated by God. The significance and identity of Jesus is an aspect of the presentation of God. As God is the authoritative identifier of Jesus, so Jesus is the authoritative identifier of God. Christology and theology are interrelated in Mark.

Thus, we may suggest that Mark's theology is a *christological theology* in that it is a theology centred on the presentation of Jesus as the one who speaks and acts for God. We may also suggest that Mark's Christology is at the same time a *theological Christology* in that Jesus is presented as finding significance and identity in his relationship to God. Although theology and Christology are considered separate concerns in Mark, as indeed God and Jesus are separate characters in the narrative, there is also the clear presentation of their inseparability within the narrative.

## Chapter Five

### “Whoever does the will of God”

### Theology and Discipleship in Mark

#### Introduction

Second only to Christology, the scholarly attention given to the disciples or the idea of discipleship in Mark has been substantial.<sup>1</sup> This is certainly understandable even to the casual reader of the second Gospel, for the narrative seems not to hide, but to bring out in the open the importance of what it means to be a disciple or follower of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> Yet much of what has caught the eye of Markan

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<sup>1</sup> The following are only a sampling of studies dedicated to some extent to the treatment of the disciples in Mark or the theme of discipleship in the second Gospel: Joseph Tyson, “The Blindness of the Disciples in Mark,” *JBL* 80 (1961): 261-268; Sean Freyne, *The Twelve: Disciples and Apostles* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1968), esp. chap. 3; Robert Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve: Discipleship and Revelation in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968); Karl G. Reploh, *Markus-Lehrer der Gemeinde: eine redaktionsgeschichtliche Studie zu den Jungerperikopen des Markus-Evangeliums* (SBM9; Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1969); Theodore J. Weeden, “The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel,” *ZNW* 59 (1968): 145-168; idem., *Mark: Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971); David J. Hawkin, “The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Markan Redaction,” *JBL* 91 (1972): 491-500; Günther Schmah, *Die Zwölf im Markusevangelium* (TThSt 30; Trier: Paulinus, 1974); Ernest Best, “The Role of the Disciples in Mark,” *NTS* 23 (1976/77): 377-401; idem., “Mark's Use of the Twelve,” *ZNW* 69 (1978): 11-35; idem., *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (JSNTSup 4; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1981); idem., *Disciples and Discipleship: Studies in the Gospel According to Mark* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986); Robert Tannehill, “The Disciples in Mark: The Function of a Narrative Role,” *JR* 57 (1977): 386-405; Eduard Schweizer, “The Portrayal of the Life of Faith in the Gospel of Mark,” *Int* 32 (1978): 387-399; John R. Donahue, *The Theology and Setting of Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark* (Milwaukee, WI: Marquette University Press, 1983); Cilliers Breytenbrach, *Nachfolge und Zukunftserwartung nach Markus: Eine methodenkritische Studie* (ATANT 71; Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1984); Vernon K. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher: A Socio-Rhetorical Interpretation of Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); Joel F. Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus: Minor Characters as Major Figures in Mark's Gospel* (JSNTSup 102; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994); Elizabeth S. Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus: Characters in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000); C. Clifton Black, *The Disciples According to Mark: Markan Redaction in Current Debate* (JSNTSup 27; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989); Jack Dean Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark: Jesus, Authorities, Disciples* (Minneapolis: Augsburg/ Fortress, 1989).

<sup>2</sup> In his recent publication on Mark, Richard Horsley argues that Mark's narrative is not primarily about discipleship, and that discipleship is only a subplot of the Markan story. I find Horsley's choice of words interesting in that he seems almost to suggest that the narrative is not at all about discipleship, yet he does not seek to refute a plethora of substantial Markan scholarship that demonstrates that indeed Mark's narrative is concerned with discipleship. If, however, his suggestion is that the second Gospel is not primarily concerned with discipleship, then I find myself in agreement with him. See Richard A. Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story: The Politics of Plot in Mark's Gospel* (Louisville: Westminster/ John Knox Press, 2001), esp. 81-86.



scholars has been the narrative portrayal of the twelve<sup>3</sup>, to the neglect of looking intently at the whole of the narrative to discover what the narrative is saying to its audience regarding their own view of what it means to be a disciple. This is not to suggest that the audience of Mark's narrative has been left out of the equation altogether. Some recent work has taken seriously the narrative portrayal of the disciples and the response this elicits from the Markan audience and how this influences their own view of discipleship.<sup>4</sup> Yet while each has contributed to the ongoing debate regarding Mark's characterization of the disciples, they have not dealt fully with the meaning of *discipleship* as it is presented throughout the narrative, and especially how this meaning relates to the presentation of God in Mark.<sup>5</sup> Thus, while the study of the characterization of the twelve in the Gospel is important, and will be addressed in this chapter, it is only a portion of the overall picture of what it means to be a disciple of Jesus. What needs to be addressed is what Mark's narrative as a whole says to its audience about discipleship.

Furthermore, studies focused on discipleship in Mark have overwhelmingly and necessarily given attention to the theme of discipleship as it relates to Markan Christology. In other words, Markan discipleship has been necessarily understood as defined in terms of the relationship between disciples and Jesus. While undoubtedly

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<sup>3</sup> See esp. Meye, *Jesus and the Twelve*; Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*; and Best, *Following Jesus*. For a valuable assessment of the works of Meye, Weeden, and Best see Black, *The Disciples According to Mark*.

<sup>4</sup> See for example, James S. Hanson, *The Endangered Promises: Conflict in Mark* (SBLDS171; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000) esp. 209-248; idem., "The Disciples in Mark's Gospel: Beyond the Pastoral/ Polemical Debate," *HBT* 20 (1998), 128-155; Paul L. Danove, *The End of Mark's Story: A Methodological Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1993); idem., "The Narrative Rhetoric of Mark's Ambiguous Characterization of the Disciples," *JSNT* 70 (1998), 21-31; Whitney T. Shiner, *Follow Me!: Disciples in Markan Rhetoric* (SBLDS145; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, esp. 70-99; Larry W. Hurtado, "Following Jesus in the Gospel of Mark—and Beyond," in *Patterns of Discipleship in the New Testament* (ed. R.N. Longenecker; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 9-29.

<sup>5</sup> While a analysis of the term μαθητής as used in the Greco-Roman culture of the period may be helpful, and a socio-rhetorical interpretation of other literature exhibiting a teacher/learner relationship (See esp. Robbins, *Jesus the Teacher*) may shed some light on the relationship between Jesus and his disciples, it is probably correct to say that by the time of Mark's writing, the term "disciple" and the meaning of discipleship took on its own connotation apart from other portrayals of the teacher/learner relationships. It must be the case, then, that Mark's audience would be well aware that the life of discipleship is equated to the life of faithfulness to Jesus, his message, and ultimately his God. Thus in using the terms disciple and discipleship, I am only using terms that are familiar to the discussion, and not using them in a technical sense to mean a "learner."

this is an integral part of the focus of the narrative, another dimension of discipleship has been neglected: theology and discipleship.<sup>6</sup> A careful reading of Mark seems to suggest that while disciples are called to faithfulness to Jesus, there is both an explicit and implicit call for disciples to be faithful to God and dependent on God, not apart from a relationship with Jesus, but ultimately along with Jesus. In other words, discipleship in Mark is both imitative in that true disciples imitate the actions of Jesus, and participative in that disciples participate with Jesus in living a life faithful to the call of God. I propose, therefore, to reinvestigate the issue of discipleship in Mark, specifically looking at how the narrative calls the audience to understand, not only the meaning of discipleship in terms of the disciple's relationship to the person of Jesus, but also the meaning of discipleship within the much broader framework of the narrative's theology.

My intention in this chapter, then, is to offer a close hearing of Mark's narrative, with an ear toward what the Gospel communicates to its audience regarding their own discipleship. Moreover, I am concerned here with how the presentation of God, or the *theo*-logy of the narrative, affects the audience's comprehension of discipleship. In other words, I will demonstrate in this chapter that there exists in the narrative a definitive *theo*-logical dimension to the portrayal of the life of faith and discipleship. In doing so, I will seek first to discuss the seemingly ambiguous role the twelve play in Mark, proposing that Mark's characterization of the disciples is for the purpose of eliciting portraits of human reality and not necessarily human failure, although one is part and parcel of the other.

Second, and related directly to my first proposal, I will seek to show that the narrative presentation of Jesus not only sets him in relation to God (see the previous chapter), but at the same time characterizes him as the true disciple, one who is faithful and true to the gospel and God. Thus I will argue that one dimension of the narrative presentation of Jesus is as the paradigmatic life of faithfulness before God. Disciples, including the Markan audience, are then called to follow Jesus as the

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<sup>6</sup> See, however, John R. Donahue "A Neglected Factor in the Theology of Mark," *JBL* 101 (1982): 563-94, who gives a brief discussion of discipleship and theology in Mark, yet does not fully investigate the issue.

model of true faithfulness before God, and in doing so they will obtain the eschatological reward given by God. Thus, by this standard, discipleship is defined in terms of following and participating with Jesus, the christological aspect, and, more importantly, in terms of the faithful life lived before the God of Jesus in Mark, the theological aspect. From this I will be able to propose my third thesis that the teaching of discipleship in Mark, while understood within the purview of the narrative's Christology, ultimately is presented within a larger framework, the narrative presentation of God.

Certainly most if not all would agree that discipleship in Mark is related both to Jesus and God. Yet as I have hopefully demonstrated in the previous discussion, God seems to play the major role in the narrative, although certainly a hidden role. But if I have argued my case sufficiently enough to convince my readers that Jesus himself finds identity and significance in his relationship to God, then it is certainly the case that the disciples, including, and especially, the audience of Mark's narrative, are to find their identity and significance in their relationship to God, which is mediated via their relationship with Jesus. Thus, those who follow Jesus on *the way* not only enter into relationship with Jesus, but also with the God of Jesus.

Before defending this thesis, however, it will be helpful to give a brief overview and critique of scholarship to date that has focused on the role of the disciples in Mark.

### **The Ambiguous Role of the Disciples in Mark**

The role of the disciples in Mark has received a great deal of attention in Markan scholarship, as evidenced by only a sampling of significant works cited above. Scholars have debated the seemingly unanswerable question of who are the disciples in Mark.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, several have essentially argued for their negative

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<sup>7</sup> One of the basic problems recognized and debated among Markan scholars is determining which characters can be identified as disciples of Jesus and how this is to be determined. Certainly everyone would recognize the twelve as the group most notably known to be the μαθητές of Jesus. Yet there are other very valuable characters in the narrative (e.g. the female followers of Jesus and the minor characters who respond positively to Jesus), that are not included among the twelve at particular points in the narrative. On these characters as disciples see Williams, *Other Followers of Jesus* and Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, esp. 41-69; 70-99; 189-225. While this is an important question, it

portrayal, while others have viewed the presentation of the disciples along more positive lines. Some have suggested that the portrayal of the disciples has been for polemical purposes, to address an alleged false Christology rampant in the Markan community. Still others have viewed Mark's treatment of the disciples as more pastoral, representing the reality of discipleship dependent on Jesus. Yet most would agree that the role played by the disciples of Jesus in Mark's Gospel is certainly ambiguous. The question remains, however, why? To answer this question, it will be necessary to lay out the main arguments of both sides of the pastoral/polemical debate, and then to propose my own reading of this ambiguous characterization.<sup>8</sup>

### Current Debate Over the Disciples in Mark

In 1971 T. J. Weeden stirred the world of Gospel scholarship with his conception that the negative portrayal of the disciples in Mark was meant to combat a christological controversy existent in the Markan community.<sup>9</sup> The christological heresy Weeden suggested to be in the sights of the Markan author was the

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will only be addressed in a cursory manner due to the main focus of this chapter, discipleship in Mark. It will be argued in this chapter, that although the minor characters do often play more positive roles than the twelve, in essence they themselves are not necessarily models of discipleship, at least the narrator does not fully use them in this way. Moreover, as will be argued, the twelve certainly do not *always* pose as models of discipleship, for they fail Jesus at the most crucial time and in doing so fail to be faithful to the will of God. Thus, in the character of Jesus the audience is left with the primary example of what it means to be faithful to the will of God. For discussions regarding the identification of the "twelve" and the "disciples" see Freyne, *The Twelve: Disciples and Apostles*, 106-150; Best, *Disciples and Discipleship*, 98-130.

<sup>8</sup> I will limit the summary and analysis of the various views on the disciples in Mark to the two most prominent sides of the debate, traditionally designated as the polemical and pastoral views. I am well aware of the earlier view of some that the role of the disciples in Mark is best explained in relation to the messianic secret in Mark. Consult esp. T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation* (Ithaca: Cornell University, 1963) and Ulrich Luz, "Das Geheimnismotiv und die Markanische Christologie," *ZNW* 56 (1965): 9-30. I have not found, however, any recent scholars who have based their views of the disciples in Mark on an association with the messianic secret.

<sup>9</sup> Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*. See also Weeden's "The Heresy that Necessitated Mark's Gospel." Weeden seems to have followed the earlier suggestions of his doctoral mentor, Norman Perrin in an essay in which Perrin argues that Mark was written to address a situation in his community. See. Norman Perrin, "Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark," in *Christology and a Modern Pilgrimage: A Discussion with Norman Perrin* (ed. H. D. Betz; Missoula: Scholars Press, 1974), 1-52. According to Perrin, Mark "allows the disciples to expose the question or express the false teaching and then puts the correct teaching on the lips of Jesus" (25). See also the earlier arguments of Tyson (*The Blindness of the Disciples*), Johannes Schreiber ("Die Christologie des Markusevangeliums," *ZTK* 53 [1961]: 154-183), and the more recent reading by Mary A. Tolbert (*Sowing the Gospel: Mark's World in Literary- Historical Perspective* [Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1989]).

community's worship of Jesus as a *divine man*, who offered assurance to his followers that they would participate in his power and glory. Weeden suggested that the narrative portrayal of the disciples as utter failures worked against this understanding of Christ, because, as Weeden saw it, the disciples in Mark are presented as voices of such a false Christology. In other words, the author of Mark used the incomprehension of the disciples over against the stern rebukes of Jesus to communicate his own Christology, one that takes seriously the theology of suffering, which is the true measure of discipleship. Weeden also finds evidence for his verdict in the enigmatic ending of Mark's narrative where the women go away from the tomb in fear and tell no one what they have been commanded to tell. Weeden sees in this scene the final attempt to reconcile the followers of Jesus with him, but in this too they fail. For Weeden then,

“...Mark is assiduously involved in a vendetta against the disciples. He is intent on totally discrediting them. He paints them as obtuse, obdurate, recalcitrant men who at first are unperceptive of Jesus' messiahship, then oppose its style and character, and finally totally reject it. As the coup de grace, Mark closes his Gospel without rehabilitating the disciples.”<sup>10</sup>

Following Weeden's thesis to some extent, Werner Kelber has argued that Mark does not argue against a false Christology, but against a false eschatology within the Markan community.<sup>11</sup> Yet, Kelber also takes a different approach to his understanding of the function of the disciples' failure in Mark. Instead of viewing the disciples as foils exposing a false Christology, Kelber sees the disciples as representative of members of the Markan church who exploited the eschatology of the Jerusalem church, which was under the leadership of James, the brother of Jesus. Jesus' renunciation of his natural family and the twelve, in favour of others (3:31-35), would signify to the Markan audience the incredibility of the leaders of the Jerusalem church, including those claiming ties to the twelve. Thus the portrayal of

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<sup>10</sup> Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*, 50-51.

<sup>11</sup> Werner Kelber, *The Kingdom in Mark: A New Place and A New Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1974); idem., *Mark's Story of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1979).



the failure of the twelve, according to Kelber, fits well within Mark's agenda to expose the eschatology of the Jerusalem church as false.<sup>12</sup>

While admitting that these two studies, and others, have taken seriously the negative depiction of the disciples in Mark, I contend that they have failed to give adequate attention to the positive presentations found in the Second Gospel. Moreover, both Weeden and Kelber begin with two untenable assumptions. First, both assume that Mark's narrative was penned for the purpose of assailing false beliefs in the Markan community. Second, and I think more implausible, is the assumption that Weeden and Kelber make in claiming to be able to identify the so-called opponents of Mark. While scholarship has recognized the value of attempting to identify the opponents of Paul by deducing clues from his letters in which he makes little reference to them, a scholarly pursuit that still finds a great number of problems, the idea that one can tease out of a narrative the view of the author's opponents is far from the same thing. Indeed, while I would concede that it is *conceivable* that Mark was writing to combat a false teaching, though I am skeptical of this opinion, it is vastly different to say that one can identify the theme or proponents of this so-called false teaching.

The pastoral view takes into account not only the negative portrayal of the disciples, but also more importantly their positive portrayal in the narrative. Championed by several, this view has had its foremost voice through the work Ernest Best.<sup>13</sup> Best and others have argued that the negative portrayal of the disciples in

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<sup>12</sup> Like Weeden, Kelber also sees the ending of Mark as substantiating his view of Mark's treatment of the twelve. He states, "After the dismal failure of the disciples at Jesus' passion, all remaining hopes focus on the final outcome of the story. But Mark, instead of reversing the disciples' course, brings it to its logical conclusion. He has reserved the ending of the gospel to deliver the mortal blow to the fate of the disciples. At the moment, having read Mark's story from beginning to end, it must dawn on the reader that the disciples missed the way into the Kingdom" See Kelber, *Mark's Story of Jesus*, 93.

<sup>13</sup> Best has written more on Markan discipleship than any other scholar to date. See esp. his *Disciples and Discipleship* and *Following Jesus: Discipleship in the Gospel of Mark*. For others who follow the same line of argument, but each having their own nuanced approach and outcome see Quentin Quesnell, *The Mind of Mark* (AnBib, 38; Rome: Biblical Institute, 1969), 114-125, 170; Camille Focant, "L'Imcompréhension des Disciples dans le deuxième Évangile," *RB* 82 (1975): 161-185; Tannehill, "The Disciples in Mark,," Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*; Joanna Dewey, "Pont of View and the Disciples in Mark," *SBL Seminar Papers*, 1982 (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1982), 97-106; Norman Peterson, "When is the End not an End? Literary Reflections on the Ending of Mark's Gospel," *Int* 34 (1980): 15-66.



Mark is for the purpose of Mark's audience.<sup>14</sup> This purpose is not in any way to diminish the positive view the Markan audience had of the disciples, but to show the power and authority of Jesus in light of the weaknesses of the disciples. In this way, the audience of Mark would understand their own weakness in discipleship and not look to the disciples for assurance, but to Jesus. According to this view then, the misunderstanding of the disciples represents the mysterious nature of the person of Jesus, and the reality that Jesus can only be fully understood when one is given divine insight into this mystery.<sup>15</sup>

While I find the arguments of those who advocate the pastoral function more substantial than those proposed by the polemical side of the debate, in my view the pastoral model needs to be adjusted to serve the purposes of my argument. For one thing, it is doubtful that we can reduce the attitudes of the disciples to incomprehension, whether this means they are *unable* to understand<sup>16</sup> or *refuse* to understand.<sup>17</sup> It is certainly true that they are described as not understanding at various stages in the narrative, and certainly the characterization of Jesus as the one who fully understands is highlighted through this contrast. Yet it seems that this incomprehension is only a portion of the failure of these disciples. Indeed, their ultimate failure is not that they cannot comprehend who Jesus is, but that they fail to follow him in his suffering. They fail, then, not only in insight, but also in their call to participate fully in the ministry of Jesus.

As I shall argue below, the characterisation of Jesus in contrast to the disciples is certainly for the purpose of focusing the audience's attention onto Jesus' authority and power as Best and others have argued. Yet, it must be the case that this narration is also done for the benefit of the Markan audience, so that they would find an example of true faithfulness in the person of Jesus. Moreover, as I shall also argue, it seems that the presentation of some of Jesus' actions and words are for the

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<sup>14</sup> Ernest Best, "Peter in the Gospel According to Mark," *CBQ* 40 (1978): 558 argues that the interest Mark has in the failure of the disciples, especially Peter, may go back to Peter himself.

<sup>15</sup> See Best, "The Role of the Disciples in Mark," 387-388; 400-401; Frank Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples and Peter's Confession (Mark 6,14-8,30)," *Bib* 70 (1989): 153-172.

<sup>16</sup> So Matera, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples."

<sup>17</sup> So Best, "The Role of the Disciples in Mark."

purpose of calling the audience to imitate Jesus and his faithfulness before God and not to imitate the disciples and their failure to be faithful.<sup>18</sup> We may even go so far as to say that the Markan audience is not only called to imitate Jesus, but also in some sense they are called to participate with him, a point I shall develop further below.

Thus, the pastoral view of the role of the disciples, in my opinion, has more validity than the polemical view. Yet, as I shall seek to argue below, the pastoral view seems to take a strictly christological view of the role of the disciples, and I shall be proposing a theological understanding of discipleship in Mark's narrative.

### **The Disciples in Mark: Portraits of Reality**

What, then, are we to make of the portrayal of the disciples in Mark's gospel? If Mark's story is not written to combat a heresy within the Markan community, why would Mark present the disciples in such a negative light? While I am cautious to avoid simplistic answers to these questions, it seems to me that the most valid, and I think defensible answer, is that the ambiguous portrayal of the disciples in Mark is for the purpose of demonstrating to the Markan audience the reality of human existence before God. Clearly one can see the great dichotomy that exists within the narrative between "the things of God and the things of humans" (8:33). Moreover, audiences often meet characters in narratives much like they meet real people in everyday life.<sup>19</sup> Thus the presentation of characters moves beyond the presentation of characters as plot functionaries, to that of real people who can be known and discussed outside the story. Or to state it in terms specific to the Markan portrayal of the twelve, these characters are more than polemic functionaries; they are real characters who present to the audience the reality of success and failure, particularly related to the life of faith before God.<sup>20</sup> The negative and positive portrayals of the

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<sup>18</sup> As Matera (Frank Matera, *What are they saying about Mark* [Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987], 41) aptly puts it, "Mark does not polemicize against them but uses the story of their failure to call Christians to authentic discipleship characterized by a willingness to follow Jesus on the way."

<sup>19</sup> On this see Baruch Hochman, *Character in Literature* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 36.

<sup>20</sup> This is not to suggest that what we have in Mark is a precise historical account of historical figures. I am not concerned with this in this thesis. I am only suggesting the presentation of these known

disciples then are both for purposes of plot and to demonstrate human failure and possibility before God that occur in the lives of real people. In this way the Markan audience is confronted by their own reality as followers on the way.<sup>21</sup> They are called to faith and discipleship, which is defined not only in following Jesus, but also in their dependence on God. Jesus is clearly seen as the true model of discipleship who thinks the things of God and is dependent on the Spirit of God to carry out God's will. The disciples are presented as often weak followers of Jesus, whose relationship to God comes through Jesus. Thus, the Markan audience is presented with a choice of two models to follow. Either they can follow the examples of the disciples, which will lead to misunderstanding and failure. Or they can follow the example of Jesus that will lead to understanding and faithfulness before God.

Given this awareness of the narrative presentation of both Jesus and the disciples, it seems very plausible to me that the audience of the Markan narrative would view Jesus as the paradigmatic disciple, who not only makes the way possible for them to be in relationship to the God of Israel, but sets for them an example of how one truly lives faithfully before God. Moreover, the audience of Mark's story would view themselves as the discipleship community, the new community of God, and Jesus as the one whom they follow and with whom they participate in doing the will of God. Thus, it is crucial for my argument that I demonstrate that Jesus is presented as the paradigmatic disciple in Mark's narrative.

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historical figures is for the purpose of showing both faithfulness and failure to an audience who are to look to Jesus as the paradigmatic disciple. In his recent monograph on Mark, Horsley, once again suggests that the characters in Mark are basically plot functionaries (Horsley, *Hearing the Whole Story*, 84). In other words, the characters are only necessary to develop the plot of the narrative. This, I believe, is too one sided a view. While characters in any story function to develop the plot, this in no way precludes them from functioning like real persons. Characters in stories are experienced as people are in everyday life. One learns and experiences knowledge of another person through the actions that one observes from that person. That person may show good characteristics some of the time, and yet bad characteristics at other times. Likewise, the presentation of the characters in Mark, with both good and bad qualities, shows the realistic presentation to the audience.

<sup>21</sup> This is given support by the thesis of Augusti Borrell, *The Good News of Peter's Denial: A Narrative and Rhetorical Reading of Mark 14:54.66-72* (trans. S. Conlon; Atlanta: Scholar's Press, 1998). Borrell argues that we are to think of the presentation of Peter and the others "not as an ideal model to be imitated in everything, but rather with a realistic characterisation with positive and negative traits—with, in the concrete, a strong desire to be loyal to Jesus, mixed with human weakness. The reader can easily identify himself with this image; not to reproduce it, but to feel involved and to take stock in his own situation." (197).

### Jesus as the paradigmatic disciple in Mark

It is obvious, even from a cursory reading of Mark that Jesus is the one others are called to follow. A closer reading of the narrative, however, also suggests that Jesus defines by both his teachings and his actions what it means to be a disciple. The very act of following Jesus is a choice in which the disciple chooses to walk the way of God, the very way (ὁδός) Jesus chooses to walk. Thus, what is important for understanding discipleship also includes understanding Jesus' own faithfulness to the will of God for his life and ministry.

This I believe is artfully communicated in Mark through a number of ways. First, the plot of the narrative seems to hint that an early Christian audience might understand their own lives of discipleship as paralleling the Markan Jesus' life. Second, there are a number of places in the narrative where Jesus is presented implicitly and explicitly as modelling faith in God and faithfulness to God. Third, the significant use of the enigmatic self-designation Son of Man by the Markan Jesus may help in the presentation of Jesus as the true human before God. It is to these subjects that I now turn my attention, proposing that Jesus prevails as the model disciple in Mark, and those who follow him do so not only in imitation of him, but as participants with him in doing the will of God.

#### *The Plot of Mark and the Narrative Jesus as the Paradigm of Discipleship*

While the focus of this thesis is strictly on a reading of Mark's narrative, the other Synoptic Gospels help to draw attention to what is missing from Mark.<sup>22</sup> Both Matthew and Luke go to great lengths to tell of the circumstances surrounding the birth of Jesus, each telling the story differently. However, one quickly notices when reading Mark alongside these, that the author has no concern for the birth of Jesus. Indeed, nothing is ever said about the childhood of Jesus or his family, except what is found in chapter 3. Like the appearance of John in Mark 1:4, Jesus seems to emerge on the scene without any reference to his origins. From a christological-theological perspective, this may stress that Jesus' beginnings are not found in human

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<sup>22</sup> Without justification at this point, I assume the two-source hypothesis, the priority of Mark, and that Matthew and Luke both utilised Mark independently as a source.

relationships, but that he is first and foremost the Beloved Son of God, whose identity and significance come from God (1:9-11). However, we may also suggest, following others who have made these observations, that the exclusion of a birth narrative, and the opening of the Gospel with the baptism of Jesus, may also be for the purpose of connecting the believer's life with the life of Jesus. From baptism, to walking on the way faithfully, to death and resurrection, the Markan Jesus is set forth as an example for the Markan audience to emulate.<sup>23</sup> The Markan Jesus begins his life at baptism, and then faces temptations throughout<sup>24</sup>, and ultimately, because of his faithfulness to the will of God, he is handed over for suffering and death. Thus in following the Markan Jesus, the narrative audience is following the one who authentically demonstrates how one walks before God. In my discussion, however, I want to expand further on this idea to demonstrate more fully how Jesus is presented in this way. Of greatest significance will be what we have earlier discussed pertaining to the Christology of Mark's narrative, that is the presentation of Jesus as an aspect of the presentation of God. Indeed, the primary significance of Jesus as the true disciple is his relationship to God and his faithfulness before God. Thus, in serving as the model of discipleship, the Markan Jesus demonstrates what faithfulness to God entails.

We begin again with the baptism scene in Mark 1:9-11. The question that is most often raised by both scholars and lay people is why Jesus would submit to John's baptism of repentance. Mark's narrative seems to be mute in offering an answer to its audience.<sup>25</sup> However, what is forcefully communicated by this scene is

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<sup>23</sup> As P. Davis states, "Mark's whole story of Jesus can be read as a blueprint for the Christian life: it begins with baptism, proceeds with the vigorous pursuit of ministry in the face of temptation and opposition, and culminates in suffering and death oriented towards an as-yet unseen vindication." See Philip G. Davis, "Christology, Discipleship, and Self-Understanding in the Gospel of Mark," in *Self-Definition and Self-Understanding in Early Christianity: A Case of Shifting Horizons* (ed. D. Hawkin and T. Robinson. Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 1990), 109.

<sup>24</sup> On the temptation of Jesus in Mark see Susan R. Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus in Mark's Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998) and Jeffrey B. Gibson, *The Temptations of Jesus in Early Christianity* (JSNTSup 112; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995).

<sup>25</sup> I will not venture to discuss the issue of what Jesus' submission to baptism means for the traditional view of Jesus' sinlessness. In my reading of Mark, the narrative is not concerned with this, and therefore is silent. This does not mean that the doctrine is in question in Mark. It simply means that the narrative is not concerned with answering this question. For a discussion of this question see

God's approval of the Son in this act of baptism (ἐν σοὶ εὐδόκησα; 1:11).<sup>26</sup>

While Jesus seems to be the only character in the story who hears the voice from heaven, the Markan audience, through their hearing of the narrative, are privy to be present with Jesus and to hear the voice he hears. One must ask what this means for the listening audience of the second Gospel? On the one hand, as I have argued throughout this thesis, the words that the voice utters set forth for the audience the true identity of Jesus as the Son of God. On the other hand, the confirmation of God's pleasure with the Son in his act of baptism may resonate in the ears of the audience as God's confirmation of the faithful who submit to baptism as an act of commitment to God's coming eschatological rule.<sup>27</sup> In surrendering to baptism, then, the audience in essence submits to the same divine authority to which Jesus submits. Thus the symbolic act of wading into the waters of baptism stands as the disciple's act of identifying with Jesus and his mission of service to God, and serves as the beginning point of walking faithfully before God. Moreover, the baptised members of Mark's audience are recipients of the same Spirit that comes onto Jesus at his baptism. As this Spirit empowers Jesus for his ministry, so also the Spirit empowers believers for their ministry (cf. 13:11). This baptism and Spirit-filling is also that which sets Jesus over against the world and the evil powers that seek to rule, and sets him as the one who ushers in the dynamic rule of God. For the audience, baptism and Spirit-filling also set them apart from the rule of evil in the world, and sets them squarely under the rule of God.

It is the battle of kingdoms that quickly begins after the baptism of Jesus when the Spirit of God throws Jesus into the wilderness to be tempted. Again, Jesus

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George R. Beasley-Murray, *Baptism in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1962), 45-67 and the literature cited there.

<sup>26</sup> Mary R. Thompson (*The Role of Disbelief in Mark* [New York: Paulist Press, 1989], 66) states that though Jesus actively comes out to John, he passively receives John's baptism, thus creating irony for the audience. Certainly there is irony in the sense that the greater one is submitting to the baptism performed by the lesser one, but the audience is well aware that John himself does not baptize by his own authority, but only by the authority given to him by God. Thus Jesus does not submit to John's baptism, but to God's authority expressed through John's baptism (cf. 11:27-33).

<sup>27</sup> On the portrayal of Jesus' baptism in Mark, Marcus states, "It may also have been influenced by the institution of Christian baptism, since early Christians believed that *they* had become children of God in *their* baptisms by receiving the Spirit, which showed God's delight in them." See Joel Marcus, *Mark 1-8* (AB 27; New York: Doubleday, 2000), 164.



serves as the model of true discipleship, for he faithfully averts the advances of Satan.<sup>28</sup> In doing so, Jesus again serves to exemplify how one who is called a disciple stands against the evil one in temptation. His faithfulness in his resistance is due to more than his resolve to do the will of God, however. He acts faithfully because of his reliance on the Spirit of God.

These two points in the narrative function to set the tone for the remaining story as Jesus is presented as the faithful Son of God. The Markan audience, however, does not gather information solely about Jesus' identity and significance, but also comprehends Jesus as the one who marks the way of faithfulness before God. This way of faithfulness is ultimately for the purpose of serving God under whom Jesus submits his own life, as evident in his not fully accepting the prerogatives of God, such as being called "good" (10:17-18), giving seats of authority in the kingdom (10:40), or having knowledge of the time of the eschatological events to come (13:32), except when he understands that such authority has been given to him by God (2:10, 28).

This idea is carried over into Jesus' public ministry, as it begins with his proclamation of the gospel and the coming rule of God (1:14-15). What Jesus proclaims and teaches throughout the narrative, as argued in the previous chapter, follows from this initial and model proclamation of the gospel of God and the coming reign of God. As such, his actions set forth for his disciples, including the audience of the narrative, their own calling to proclaim the message of the gospel from/about God. The result of Jesus' proclamation and teaching is that he faces opposition mainly from the religious leaders of Israel, but also from his family, his friends, and the crowds. Likewise, he affirms to those who are faithful to the gospel message, that they too will face fierce opposition (13:9-13).

In the face of such opposition Jesus' reaction is crucial for the audience's conception of what it means to be a true disciple. While in the second Gospel Jesus does not teach his disciples to turn the other cheek when facing one's enemies, he

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<sup>28</sup> While there is no explicit indication of Jesus' success, except for the enigmatic reference to the presence of angels, it would most likely be assumed by the Markan audience that Jesus does remain faithful during this wilderness temptation. See Garrett, *The Temptations of Jesus*, 59.

conveys through his actions the authority he has over his enemies, yet an authority limited to a non-violent reaction to their opposition. To be sure, Jesus' view of his death is voiced in such a way as communicating his understanding of God's activity and will in this death, and Jesus' own willingness to go to this death (8:31; 9:31; 10:33; 14:36). Important in this respect is Jesus' concept of his mission as being in service to others (10:45). His mission is that which is given to him by the one who sent him, God (9:37). Moreover, in the hours of his arrest, trial, and crucifixion, Jesus is resolved to do the will of God in going to death (14:36). To be sure, in the scene in which he dies, Jesus is mocked because, in the eyes of those mocking him, he was powerful enough to save others, yet he cannot save himself from the anguished death on the cross (15:31). Yet the ironic twist of this scene is that it aids in reminding the Markan audience that Jesus is living out his own message of true greatness, by being the servant who saves others by giving his own life away (Cf. 8:35). His life of service, then, achieves the narrative purpose of setting the example not only for those who follow him in the narrative, but also for those who hear the narrative. He dies as one who faithfully carries out God's mission, and he does so without resorting to violent insurrection.

This begs the question, for what purpose does it serve the Markan audience for their own perception of faithfulness before God that the Markan Jesus voluntarily goes to his death? The answer seems to be that the Markan Jesus understands this suffering and death to be the will of God, and that his vindication will come by the authority and power of God (12:10-11, 36). Thus, the climax of the narrative is not Jesus' death, but his resurrection. It is this event that demonstrates to the Markan audience that because of his faithfulness to God's will Jesus is vindicated by God as he is proclaimed by the young man in the tomb as having been raised (ἡγέρθη), implying God's actions in raising Jesus from death. In this, Jesus again serves as the precursor of discipleship who gives hope to the Markan audience that God is the God of the living (12:27); and disciples who endure the conflict to come, will be vindicated as Jesus himself was vindicated (13:9-13).

Thus the narrative structure of Mark's Gospel itself can be understood as presenting Jesus as an exemplar of doing the will of God. It is very conceivable that

an early Christian audience of Mark's narrative would have recognized the story of Jesus as their own story. From baptism, to proclaiming the kingdom of God and doing the will of God, to facing opposition and persecution, one aspect of the narrative presentation of Jesus reflects the life of the implied audience of Mark's narrative. The hope that is held out for the audience is that as Jesus was vindicated by God by being raised from death, so those who are faithful will also be vindicated. The narrative structure of Mark implies this story line.

To expand upon this idea of Jesus as the archetype of Christian discipleship for the Markan audience, it will be helpful to look in detail at particular points in the narrative where this is implicit and explicit. To begin, we will look at the faith of Jesus in the narrative, a faith dependant solely on the God of Israel.

### *The Faith of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark*

As extensively discussed in the previous chapter, Jesus' power to perform miracles in Mark is a result of his Spirit empowerment at his baptism. However, we may venture to suggest that this power to do miracles may also be credited to his full reliance and faith in God to work miracles of power through him. This is particularly clear in the description of Jesus "looking up to heaven" (ἀναβλέψας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν; 7:34) before healing the deaf mute, an action indicating his looking to God for power to heal the man.<sup>29</sup> This may also be implied, however, in Jesus' call for supplicants who seek healing to have faith (5:36; 9:23). The object of their faith is left unsaid, and the audience of Mark is led to fill a gap with information from the narrative, causing them quite possibly to understand Jesus calling these individuals to have faith in God, or at the very least to have faith in the power of God at work in him.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, it is unlikely, given Jesus' submission to God in Mark, that he calls others to have faith in him alone, but most likely to have faith in the God who is present and active in his ministry. The call to have faith in God is explicitly given by Jesus to Peter concerning the withered fig tree. Jesus calls him to "have faith in

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<sup>29</sup> Gundry, *Mark*, 384.

<sup>30</sup> Stephen C. Barton, *The Spirituality of the Gospels* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 44-45.

God” (ἔχετε πίστιν θεοῦ; 11:22). Moreover, when his disciples are concerned as to why they could not cast the evil spirit out of the young boy in 9:16-29, Jesus responds, “This kind can come out only through prayer” (9:29), indicating to these disciples that the true source of power to overcome the demonic forces is God, to whom faith is expressed through prayer.<sup>31</sup>

Jesus also expresses faith in his God regarding the threats against him. The narrative of 4:35-41 presents the disciples in great fear over the raging storm that threatens their lives. Yet Jesus is asleep in the boat, implying his own faith in the sovereign power of God.<sup>32</sup> Even in the face of his imminent death, Jesus expresses his full faith in God, as well as his own faithfulness as the true disciple, by accepting this death as that which God wills (14:36). Moreover, Jesus demonstrates his own faith in the power of God to raise him from the dead (8:31; 9:9; 9:31; 10:34; 14:28), and vindicate him in glory (8:38; 13:26; 15:62).

As mentioned above, Jesus calls his disciples to prayer in the face of the evil spirits that plague the young man in 9:16-29. There is little doubt that Jesus issues this call based on his own practice of prayer, as narrated, if only briefly, in Mark. I have already pointed to his “looking to heaven” in 7:34 as an implication of prayer. There are, however, other places where Jesus is presented as exercising this practice of prayer. These places in the narrative where the audience sees Jesus at prayer can be viewed as significant events in the life and ministry of Jesus. In 1:35 Jesus goes to a solitary place to pray just before he goes out to proclaim the gospel. His statement, “For this is what I came out to do,” as I suggested in the previous chapter, serves to imply more than just his coming out from one territory to enter another. Rather, it defines the commission for which he was sent from God. Jesus’ prayer in solitude sets the stage for his powerful proclamation of the gospel, and serves the

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<sup>31</sup> On prayer as an expression of faith in the pericope of 9:14-29 see Ian G. Wallis, *The Faith of Jesus Christ in Early Christian Traditions* (SNTSMS 84; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 32-33.

<sup>32</sup> Hooker states, “For Jesus to sleep in these conditions suggests confidence in his disciples’ seamanship, but to sleep when surrounded by danger is also a sign of trust in God (e.g. 4:8), and no doubt Mark interpreted Jesus’ sleep in that way.” (Morna Hooker, *The Gospel According to St. Mark*. [London: A&C Black, 1991], 139).

Markan audience as a model for their own prayer and proclamation.<sup>33</sup> In 6:46, Jesus is again seen in prayer, and the audience is led to believe that his choice of venue, the mountain, means that he again finds a place of seclusion. Moreover, the mountain may signify Jesus' desire not only to be in seclusion, but his desire to be in close proximity to God. Again, his act of prayer precedes an important event in his ministry, his walking on water, an epiphany before his disciples.

The third and final time Jesus is seen in prayer is the most crucial of the three. The prayer in the Garden just prior to Jesus' death is characterised by his anguish over this ensuing event. Moreover, his call to the disciples to watch and pray, and their failure to follow this command, signifies to the audience that Jesus' posture of prayer indicates his full reliance on God's Spirit to empower him for suffering, and contrasts the disciples' reliance on the "flesh" at a time of testing. It is true that Jesus' prayer is offered in hopes that God would rescue him from suffering, as Dowd points out.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, his determination to do the will of God, even if this means to suffer and die, indicates the likelihood that Jesus' strength in the face of suffering and death is due to his dependence on the power of God through prayer. The juxtaposition of the weak and sleeping disciples with the strong and awake Jesus also suggests the strength Jesus receives from God through his Garden prayer. After coming to find his disciples sleeping yet a third time, Jesus seems to be more determined to carry out the will of God.<sup>35</sup> The tone of 14:42 particularly conveys this idea that Jesus has gained strength through his prayer of reliance on God.<sup>36</sup>

It is this idea of doing the will of God that marks the true disciple (3:35). This is no more clearly seen in the life of Jesus than when he carries out God's own will in his life. This in no way indicates that disciples must suffer to be doers of God's will, but it does mean that disciples must do the will of God as exemplified by

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<sup>33</sup> On this see Walter Kirchschräger, "Jesu Gebetsverhalten als Paradigma zu Mk 1,35," *Kairos* 20 (1978): 306.

<sup>34</sup> Sharyn E. Dowd, *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering* (SBLDS 105; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988), 157-158.

<sup>35</sup> Dowd (*Prayer*, 157) rightly states, "(I)n his prayer at the center of the Gethsemane pericope, the Markan Jesus does not reject miraculous rescue and choose to suffer. Rather, he rejects his own will, that is, he 'denies himself' as he advocated in 8:34, and chooses the will of God."

<sup>36</sup> On the strength of Jesus in this scene see Gundry, *Mark*, 856.

Jesus, even when this brings on suffering.<sup>37</sup> The faith of Jesus expressed through his prayer offered to his Father, is a model faith that the narrative expects the audience to emulate, and is a prayer in which they are called to participate. For the Markan audience, then, Jesus serves as the model of their own faith.

*Jesus the Human One in Mark*

A great deal of discussion has already been spent in this thesis regarding the presentation of Jesus: the Christology of the narrative. In that chapter, so-called christological titles were examined, including the one that continues to elude the scholar's search for significance and meaning: the Son of Man. In the previous discussion of this title, I demonstrated, focusing solely on the narrative's use of the title, how the Son of Man title is used to align Jesus with God and God's mission. The Son of Man is the one who has been given authority by God, who goes the way of God to death as a ransom for the many, and who will be vindicated by God because of his faithfulness. It is certain that in the narrative of Mark Jesus uses this expression as a self-designation. While the discussion of this title in scholarly circles has revolved somewhat around the human versus divine dimension, could it be that the ambiguous use of this term is to present the paradox of Jesus' identity and significance? On the one hand, the Son of Man is the one who is exalted by God, who comes on the clouds of glory, reflecting the Son of Man in Daniel's vision. On the other hand, this same Son of Man seems to be the human being who stands before God and who follows the way of God. The title seems to be meaningless regarding the nature of Jesus, but is used to communicate his role as God's servant who fulfils God's mission.

Given this understanding, then, it seems plausible to suggest that the intention of this so-called title in Mark is to set Jesus apart from other characters in the narrative, particularly his followers. It is Jesus who is given authority. It is Jesus who is called by God to suffer and die. And it is Jesus who will be vindicated by

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<sup>37</sup> The issues of suffering and discipleship in Mark have been significant points of debate among scholars. These will be addressed more fully later in this chapter.



God. Thus the Son of Man designation works to distinguish Jesus from all of the other characters.

Philip Davis suggested that this fits with the divine and human dichotomy that exists in the narrative.<sup>38</sup> He argues that though "Son of Man" indicates that Jesus is the human being, its use in Mark associates Jesus as the human being who is in relationship to God and does what only God can do. Moreover, its use in the passion predictions found in Mark, particularly 9:31, illuminate further this dichotomy, as "the Son of Man (ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου) will be handed over into the hands of men (ἀνθρώπων)." The idea, as Davis argues, is that Jesus is the human being "who is on God's side."<sup>39</sup> We could also suggest that because Jesus is the Son of Man who stands on the side of God, who is imbued with the authority of God, and who "does the will of God," that his statements about the coming of the Son of Man in glory and vindication (8:38; 13:26; 14:62) reflect God's rewarding of his faithful Son by exalting him to a place of participation in God's authority.

What, then, does the designation Son of Man, or Human One, mean for understanding Jesus as the paradigmatic disciple of God? First, some have translated ὁ υἱὸς τοῦ ἀνθρώπου as Human One, signifying Jesus as the one who fulfils the destiny of true humanity under the rule of God.<sup>40</sup> In his self-designation, Jesus defines himself as the one who fulfils the will of God, again being set apart from other characters. Yet as the Son of Man, the Human One, the Markan Jesus is a model to be followed by those characters who choose to be faithful to this will of God.

Second, the occurrence of this term within the passion predictions is instructive in that when Jesus states that the Son of Man will be handed over to death, he follows this with some sort of instruction concerning discipleship and service. In his actions as Son of Man, the human being who walks faithfully unto

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<sup>38</sup> Phillip G. Davis, "Mark's Christological Paradox," *JSNT* 35 (1989): 3-18. See also Davis, "Christology, Discipleship, and Self-Understanding," 101-119.

<sup>39</sup> Davis, "Mark's Christological Paradox," 10.

<sup>40</sup> See the most recent work by Walter Wink, *The Human Being: Jesus and the Enigma of the Son of Man* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2002).

death at the hands of evil, Jesus makes the way possible for those who choose to be faithful. In following the Human One, then, disciples are called to accept the will of God by being servants of one another and the gospel. The result may possibly lead to the cross, as it will for the Son of Man. But this death will not go unnoticed, as God will vindicate those who are faithful.

This vindication is attested in other Son of Man sayings. In 8:38 Jesus states, "Those who are ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, of them the Son of Man will also be ashamed when he comes in the glory of his Father." The words about which Jesus speaks in 8:38 are certainly the gospel of God he proclaims and teaches. Moreover, the contrast between "this adulterous and sinful generation" and coming "in the glory of his Father" implies the human-divine dichotomy prevalent in Mark's narrative. While the statement is given in the negative, the reverse can easily be deduced to mean that Jesus, the Human One, will not be ashamed of those who are faithful to live as he has lived and to proclaim the message that he himself has proclaimed.

Mark 10:32-45 presents a very helpful pericope in comprehending this precise idea. The designation, Son of Man, brackets the discussion Jesus has with James and John in response to their request for seats of authority. Jesus is forthright in informing his disciples concerning his fate, this time seemingly more adamant in his determination as he tells them, "Behold we are going up to Jerusalem." (10:33). Yet again, these disciples are unaware of the implication of Jesus' comments, and the narrative presentation of James and John characterises them as not only failures in seeing the fate of Jesus, but also as self interested glory seekers. These disciples request something that Jesus himself cannot give to them, seats in glory. These are places that have been prepared (ἡτοιμάσται), a passive verb indicating God as the one who has prepared these seats. In stating his lack of authority to give these seats to his disciples, and implying that God is the only one who has this authority, Jesus is not suggesting that James and John will not receive these seats. Rather, what may be implied in this strange saying is a reference to the vindication that will be given by God to those who choose to walk faithfully before God in service. This service is defined in the extreme by emulating the Son of Man, who came not to be served but

to serve. This service is rendered to God and to humanity in the death of the Son of Man. From a discipleship aspect, then, the Human One sets the example for true humanity's living out the will of God by rendering service to God and others. This runs in opposition to the way one receives glory in the human realm, by ruling over (κατακυριεύουσιν) others; again the human-divine dichotomy is present (10:42-44). The message of the narrative then, offers Jesus as the Human One who is the paradigmatic disciple who walks faithfully before God, even unto death, and who hopes in the vindication of God. The discipleship community of Mark is called to do the same.

*Jesus and the Disciples: Co-workers in the Kingdom of God*

A vitally important aspect of understanding discipleship in Mark is to grasp as best as one can the relationship between Jesus and those who follow him in the narrative. While a christological dimension of discipleship is present in that these followers are called to imitate Jesus, there is also a strong sense in Jesus' call for them to participate with him in fulfilling God's call.

This is evident in a number of references to the disciples being with Jesus. The calling and appointing of the disciples in 3:13-19 is for the purpose of being with Jesus, and to be sent out to proclaim the message. The forward position of ἵνα ὦσιν μετ' αὐτοῦ indicates that the primary purpose for the calling and appointing of these disciples is to be in fellowship with Jesus on his mission. The proclamation (κηρύσσειν) to which they are appointed is derivative of Jesus' proclamation, and extends from their having been with him.<sup>41</sup> From this point Jesus is mostly with his disciples, except at times when he withdraws from them for prayer (6:46) or when he sends them out on mission (6:7-13).

There is, however, a concentration of references to Jesus being with his disciples or his disciples being with him in chapter 14 (vv. 14, 17, 18, 20, 33). These

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<sup>41</sup> Guelich, states, "Their being in the company of Jesus provided the Twelve with the basis for their mission, to proclaim what was transpiring in the person of Jesus. Furthermore, they went as his messengers to declare his message as *participants* in his ministry and with his authorization" (*Mark*, 159; italics added).

are a mixture of references to this relationship that highlight Jesus' intimacy with his co-workers. What may be particularly fascinating is the fact that the references cited above occur in the context of the Passover Meal celebration. In this scene there is a paradoxical portrayal of the relationship between Jesus and his disciples. On the one hand, the intimacy of the meal is clear. On the other hand, this intimacy is strained as Jesus predicts that the one eating with him (μετ' ἐμοῦ; 14:18), the one dipping bread into the bowl with him (μετ' ἐμοῦ; 14:20) will betray him. Yet, this one is not alone in his guilt, as Jesus predicts that the other disciples will desert him in his time of need. Even in the Garden, where Jesus takes James, John and Peter with him (μετ' αὐτοῦ; 14:33), the beginning of the split in the relationship is made as the disciples fail to stay awake and pray with Jesus during his greatest time of need for intimacy. The intimacy between Jesus and his disciples, those chosen to be with him, will now be severely challenged, even damaged, by the suffering to come.

What may also be interesting is the fact that the mention of someone being with Jesus does not occur again after the scene in the Garden. Ironically the *idea* is present in the scene where the servant-girl in 14:67 questions Peter, "You also were with (μετὰ) Jesus, the man from Nazareth." Peter emphatically denies this accusation. The intimacy of being a co-worker with Jesus, of sharing in the ministry to which God had called him, and sharing in the Passover Meal, now gives way for the complete desertion of these disciples and their estrangement from Jesus. The movement of Peter from court to forecourt now replaces the intimacy of the boat, the road, and particularly the table. Peter's denial of ever "being with" Jesus distances him not only from the one he was called to be with, but also the God of Mark's narrative. Jesus, again, is left as the sole executor of God's will.

Despite this failure of those called to be with Jesus, the empty tomb scene serves as the climax of the narrative and the relationship between Jesus and his followers. The women arrive at the tomb to view the corpse of their former teacher, but are instead met by a young man dressed in a white robe, clearly a divine messenger, who proclaims that Jesus has been raised. He orders the women to go and tell *his* (αὐτοῦ) disciples and Peter that Jesus will meet them in Galilee (16:7).

The divine power to raise Jesus from the dead (ἡγέρθη) reflects the divine reversal of the tragedy of not only the death of the Beloved Son, but also the broken relationship between Jesus and those who are called to be with him.<sup>42</sup> The human failure is replaced by divine faithfulness to the Son and those called to be with him, as God's triumph in raising Jesus to life makes possible the reuniting of Jesus and those called to participate with him. Moreover, the ending of the narrative with a promise from the heavenly messenger that Jesus will meet his followers in Galilee leaves the audience with the continued presence of Jesus with the discipleship community. Instead of narrating an ascension story, as Matthew and Luke do, Mark ends with the implication that Jesus is continuing in his ministry on earth with those called to participate with him.

This begs the question, however, concerning the ostensible failure of the women who witness the messenger and hear his words. Many have accepted the view that 16:8 indicates that the women failed in their mission to relay this message to Peter and the others.<sup>43</sup> However, I am more convinced by Andrew Lincoln's argument that verses 7 and 8 need to be viewed together, and that the juxtaposition of these verses "provide a paradigm for the interplay between divine promise and human failure." "Mark's story allows for human failure even after the resurrection yet holds out the triumph of God's purpose despite this."<sup>44</sup> Moreover, it is certainly beyond doubt that Mark's audience would have been familiar with some form of the empty tomb story, which means that the women most likely did what they were commanded to do at some point.<sup>45</sup> Regardless of the women's failure or faithfulness, the point made by the resurrection of Jesus is that God's power is presented as overcoming human evil (the trial and crucifixion of Jesus) and human failure (the

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<sup>42</sup> Borrell, *The Good News of Peter's Denial*, 167.

<sup>43</sup> See for example Winsome Munro, "Women Disciples in Mark?" *CBQ* 44 (1982): 237-238; Weeden, *Traditions*, 50, 117; John Dominic Crossan, "Empty Tomb and Absent Lord (Mark 16:1-8)," in *The Passion in Mark* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 149.

<sup>44</sup> Andrew T. Lincoln, "The Promise and the Failure: Mark 16:7, 8," *JBL* 108 (1989): 283-300. Quotes are taken from 293 and 297 respectively.

<sup>45</sup> See David Catchpole, "The Fearful Silence of the Women at the Tomb: A Study in Markan Theology," *JTSA* 18 (1977): 3-10. Catchpole demonstrates that verse 8 can be understood to mean that the women went away and told no one except Peter and his disciples.

desertion of Jesus). It is God, then, who restores the relationship between Jesus and those called to be with him.

Therefore, the Markan narrative presentation of discipleship is two-fold. On the one hand, disciples are called to follow Jesus as the one who models doing the will of God. At the same time, however, disciples are called to participate with Jesus in doing God's will. Mark's Jesus is the paradigm of true faithfulness before God, and those called to participate with him are called primarily to faithfulness before God. Thus while discipleship in Mark is clearly an aspect of Mark's Christology, the often neglected factor is discipleship as an aspect of Mark's *theo*-logy.

### **Theology and Discipleship in Mark**

The above discussion has demonstrated that a primary role Jesus plays in the Markan narrative is as paradigmatic disciple, the one who walks faithfully before God despite the challenges this produces. The disciples are called to be with Jesus as co-workers in his proclamation and ministry. The role of disciples, whether this is related only to the twelve or to all the characters called by Jesus, is as portraits of reality. In other words, the negative portrayal of the disciples is certainly not for the purpose of attacking so-called Markan opponents, as some would propose, but may instead be the mode by which the narrator communicates to the audience the weakness of human striving before God, even from those who were intimate with Jesus.

In perceiving this weakness on the part of those Markan characters who follow Jesus, the Markan audience would recognize their own failure to live faithfully apart from their dependence on God. Indeed, this is exactly what seems to make the presentation of Jesus so important to the narrative audience, for Jesus, as the model of true faithfulness, demonstrates how one carries out the will of God in the face of temptations, whether from the persona of evil in the character of Satan, the religious leaders who challenge Jesus' claims and authority, or from his closest companions, who betray him, deny him, and desert him.

Therefore, to gather a fuller picture of what the narrative communicates as true discipleship, we must look beyond the portrayal of the disciples in Mark to the



presentation of Jesus, which we have just completed, and to what the narrative teaches regarding discipleship and theology. In other words, I am suggesting that a more accurate understanding of discipleship in Mark can be deduced from investigating the relationship between those called to follow Jesus, including the audience of Mark's story, and the God of Mark's Gospel. *This relationship is not separate from that which Jesus has with God or from that which Jesus has with those he calls to follow him; it is an essential part of both.* As Jesus aligns himself with God in baptism, so disciples of Jesus align themselves with God in baptism. As disciples welcome Jesus, so disciples also welcome God (9:37). Certainly this is a christological statement from 9:37, but it is at the same time a statement of theology and discipleship, and it succinctly defines the true nature of discipleship as one's relationship to the God who has sent Jesus.

In the remainder of this chapter, then, I want to investigate the discipleship community's relationship to God as narrated in Mark. Again, I am here using the term disciple not in the sense of identifying the twelve or even the larger group of followers of Jesus in Mark. Rather, I am using the term disciple in a generic sense as all those called to follow Jesus, whether Markan characters or the Markan audience. In a very real sense then, one need not speak of disciples, a designation inextricably linked to the twelve, but must speak in terms of the discipleship community of Mark's audience.<sup>46</sup>

### *The Discipleship Community in Relationship with God*

In the previous chapter in which the Christology of Mark was discussed, we went to great lengths to demonstrate how the narrative portrayal of Jesus establishes his relationship to God. Moreover, we have just seen how the narrator also presents the relationship between Jesus and the disciples; they are called to "be with him." In this discussion, I am interested to take these ideas and show how through their relationship and participation with Jesus, these followers of Jesus are also in

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<sup>46</sup> Like Best (*Following Jesus*, 14) I am not so much concerned about the disciples, but rather with discipleship.

relationship to God.<sup>47</sup> From an audience perspective, then, the role of the followers of Jesus in Mark is key to understanding their own relationship to both Jesus and God. Thus one key element in the relationship between theology and discipleship in Mark is the relationship between God and the followers of Jesus in Mark. There are a number of key texts that require close and careful reading in order to explicate this relationship which is so key to understanding theology and discipleship in Mark. Additionally, there are themes within the stories in Mark that may help the audience see not only their own relationship to God through their relationship to Jesus, but also the importance of the inclusiveness of this relationship.

Mark 3:31-35 has been interpreted by many scholars as Jesus' negative remarks against his family. Certainly, one cannot perceive a very positive demeanour from Jesus' words about his family, but at the same time does this imply that his comment is directed at his family? If this were the case, would it not be more likely that Jesus would have been more direct in his negative comments? It seems better to take Jesus' statement on the more positive end of the spectrum and see him as implicating more about his true family than about his mother and brothers, although there is a hint of criticism of the latter. In other words, the narrative is not so much using Jesus' words as a negative portrayal of his family, but more so as a transition to define the true family of Jesus.

By defining his true family as "whoever does the will of God" Jesus also designates disciples as those who are a part of the family of God. The Markan audience by this point in the narrative understands that Jesus' relationship to God is one of υἱός and πατήρ. By declaring that those who do the will of God are his brothers, sisters, and mother, Jesus implies that those who are faithful to God are part of the family of God. It is indeed peculiar that πατήρ is absent from the list of family members that Jesus gives (3:35). Some have considered this to be an implied

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<sup>47</sup> For a view that favours the use of "participation" instead of "imitation" when describing discipleship in Mark see Thomas Söding, "Die Nachfolgeforderung Jesu im Markusevangelium," *Trierer Theologische Zeitschrift* 94 (1985): 307. Cf. Tannehill who states, "The author emphasizes the parallel between Jesus' commission and the disciples' commission. The disciples should share in Jesus' mission and fate. They are meant to be co-ameliorators and co-influencers, subordinate to Jesus but sharing in his work" (Robert Tannehill, "The Gospel of Mark as Narrative Christology," *Semeia* 16 [1979]: 65).

reference to God as the one who is the Father of Jesus. Thus, those who do the will of God find a πατήρ in Jesus' own πατήρ. But this relationship is only possible through the relationship that followers have with Jesus as the Son. Thus, the relationship between those who do the will of God with the God who is πατήρ is a derivative relationship, one which comes through both parties being in relation to Jesus.

Moreover, when we understand this saying within the narrative span of Mark, we understand that "doing the will of God" in Mark may cause one to be rejected by kin and family (6:1-6; 13:12-13), thus producing an absence of familial relationships and community. The God of Jesus who extends relations to those who do the will of God, however, fills this void, by stepping in as the πατήρ. Thus Jesus' saying is not primarily a polemical statement against his own family, but more an extension of who comprises his family.

Of significance at this point are the words of the Markan Jesus, ὃς ἂν ποιήσῃ τὸ θέλημα τοῦ θεοῦ. By moving from a reference to those around him (τοὺς περὶ αὐτὸν κύκλῳ)<sup>48</sup> as the ones who constitute his family, to including "whoever" does the will of God, the Markan Jesus addresses the audience of Mark through the text and includes them in the family of God.<sup>49</sup> This "whoever" reference, while setting limits around those who are in relationship to God, reaches beyond other limits of exclusion and opens the path of relationship to anyone who chooses to do the will of God, including both male and female.

This idea is further expressed in Mark by way of Jesus' words to the disciples regarding leaving family or being abandoned by family. In 10:28-31, Jesus responds to the concern Peter expresses regarding the disciples having left all to follow him. Jesus' response, again, deals with the issue of family, as he assures Peter that those who have left family and possessions for his sake and the sake of the gospel will be rewarded for their faithfulness. Again, Jesus extends this to more than the disciples

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<sup>48</sup> On the Hebrew image of sitting in a circle around the patriarch see Marcus, *Mark*, 286.

<sup>49</sup> On the use of "whoever" in Mark, see especially Malbon, *In the Company of Jesus*, 70-99.

via his use of οὐδεὶς. There is “no one,” then, who leaves all for his sake and the sake of the gospel he preaches, the good news from God and about the coming rule of God, who will not receive just reward. As I argued before concerning this statement by Jesus, the giver of this eschatological reward of eternal life must be understood to be God. But that which disciples will receive in this age (νῦν ἐν τῷ κοίρῳ), “households and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields,” suggests a replacement of the natural kinship with a fictive kinship over which God takes the role as πατήρ. Again, the absence of πατήρ in v30, when it is present in v29, intimates to the audience that the God of Jesus stands as the true πατήρ of Jesus’ family. Moreover, the abundance of these rewards suggests a greater and more substantial replacement for that which was left.<sup>50</sup>

In 13:12-13, a passage alluded to earlier, the audience once again hears Jesus speak of family relations, this time indicating not the disciples leaving their families, but rather the disciples’ own family members “handing them over.” The participatory nature of discipleship communicated in Mark is here brought to the fore of the minds of those who would seek to live as Jesus lives, for it implies that their fates are similar. As Jesus will be handed over, so also those who identify with him. What is tragic is the fact that this handing over will be carried out by the families of those disciples. But Jesus’ words of prophecy do not end in doom, as he also gives hope to those who live faithfully by remaining true to the good news. These will be saved (σωθήσεται), a passive verb indicating God’s actions in saving those who remain faithful. Again, the proximity of Jesus’ words about the natural family of the disciple, to the words of eschatological salvation given by God to those who remain faithful, indicate to the hearers, including the Markan audience, that as the πατήρ of Jesus will be faithful to vindicate him, so also the πατήρ of the disciples will be faithful to save them. While πατήρ is absent from 13:9-13, the disciples’ separation

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<sup>50</sup> Van Iersel, *Mark*, 330. On the inclusion of “households” and “fields” among the things the disciple will receive, see Chad Meyers (*Binding the Strong Man: A Political Reading of Mark’s Story of Jesus* [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2000], 276) who sees this as a reference to “the gathered assets of the community of faith.”

from family due to the evil actions of family members, understood within the framework of Mark in which blood kinship is replaced by a new community of friendship consisting of those who do the will of God, implies that God is the πατήρ who remains faithful to those who are handed over.

Mark 11:25, where Jesus uses the designation πατήρ in reference to God, is a clear presentation of God as the πατήρ of the disciples. Here is the only time in Mark where God is directly referred to as πατήρ ὑμῶν, and thus the only direct reference to God as the Father of the disciples, without a reference to God as the Father of Jesus. But the strangeness of this should not be pushed too far, for Jesus never refers directly to God as “my Father,” although 14:36 does make this relationship explicit for the Markan audience.

The question is why the reference to God as “your Father” at this point in the story? The misunderstanding that characterises the disciples in Mark increasingly grows as Mark’s narrative moves to its climactic end, and here the Markan Jesus must give comfort to disciples who may be shocked at what they have learned concerning the fate of Jesus and possibly the fate of the disciples. Moreover, the position of this saying following Jesus’ actions in the temple, and Peter’s discovery of the withered fig tree, gives the impression that a new community is on the horizon, one in which God’s role is that of πατήρ.

The forgiveness logion, then, conveys the idea of not only the disciples’ relationship to God, but also their relationship to one another. While the idea of “family” is not found here, the theme of relationship within the community of faith is certainly at the fore. Believers are called to maintain community with one another through forgiving one another, so that (ὁ) “your Father” will maintain relationship to them.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> There has been some debate on the understanding of τινος. Does this refer only to those in the community of faith, or also to those outside? On the view that it is a reference to those within the community of faith see Grundmann, *Markus*, 234; Lane, *Mark*, 411. For those who see this as implying those within and without the community of faith see Gnllka, *Das Evangelium nach Markus*. (Zurich/ Neukirchen: Benzinger/ Neukirchener, 1978), 2:135; Anderson, *Mark*, 268. It seems appropriate to me that both views are viable options, and one need not be taken over the other. Certainly within the narrative of Mark the believing community takes on a counter-cultural aspect in

The new covenantal community under God is most certainly evident in the Passover meal pericope of 14:17-25. Jesus, who defines the cup as his own blood which establishes a covenant between God and the πολλῶν, bonds the relationship between God and those of the new community. The intimacy of Jesus with the group of the twelve, with δώδεκα (14:17) quite possibly referring to a new covenant community echoing the twelve tribes of Israel, gives way to the world outside the meal and points to the event of Jesus' death which he has previously designated as being for the πολλή (10:45; 14:24). The covenant is not between Jesus and the disciples but between Jesus' God and πατήρ and those who follow and participate with Jesus. Thus those who participate in the meal, including early Christians of Mark's audience, are joined to the new community via the covenant between them and God. The Eucharistic meal taken in worship by the Markan audience surely causes them to see themselves as part of this new covenant community in which God extends relationship to them through the pouring out of Jesus' blood. Like the practice of baptism as initiation into the community, the worship meal rehearsed by the Markan audience reaffirms God's covenant extended to them through Jesus, the faithful envoy of God.

This idea is supported by the insights of F. J. Moloney, in his study of the Eucharist in the New Testament.<sup>52</sup> Moloney, relying on the work of two other scholars<sup>53</sup>, demonstrates the structural pattern of Mark 14:1-72 as an interchange between the failure of the disciples and the faithfulness of Jesus. The flow of the pattern draws the audience's attention to the disciples, then to Jesus, and then back to the disciples.<sup>54</sup> Moloney sees this pattern all through 14:1-72 and determines that

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which they close ranks. But on the other hand, disciples, like Jesus, are called to proclaim the gospel from God, and thus extending the opportunity of community to others, including the enemies, who stand as potential members of the community of faith.

<sup>52</sup> Francis J. Moloney, *A Body Broken for a Broken People: Eucharist in the New Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997).

<sup>53</sup> On page 47, footnote 38, Moloney cites the unpublished paper of M. Fitzpatrick, "The Shape of the Markan Passion Narrative," and the monograph by Léon Dufour, *Sharing the Eucharistic Bread: The Witness of the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1987), who both offer structures of 14:1-72 Moloney finds helpful.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid. Moloney presents a diagram of the structure on 47-48.



17-31 stands at the centre of this structure. He sees this pattern as guiding the audience to consider the impending failure of the disciples in their betrayal and desertion of Jesus, and the faithfulness of Jesus, who pours out his blood for the many. Moloney's purpose is to draw out the christological/discipleship implications of the "never-failing presence of Jesus with his ever-failing disciples," a point with which I would agree. However, given the covenantal language expressed by Jesus at the meal, it seems that the larger issue is the covenant of relationship God is establishing with the discipleship community of Jesus through the death of the Beloved Son. Thus, as Moloney correctly points out, the elements of the meal point to the cross, and beyond to the covenant community of God, in which God's dynamic rule is ever present.<sup>55</sup>

What is interesting about this covenant-establishing meal is its place within the narrative. The prediction of the approaching betrayal and denial on the part of the disciples frames the meal (17-21; 26-31), and reminds the Markan audience that despite the failure of the disciples, and God's knowledge of their future failure, expressed through Jesus' quotation of Zech 13:7 in which God speaks about the desertion of sheep, God's will is to establish a covenantal relationship with the new community.<sup>56</sup>

Another aspect that may be present in this narrative scene is the implication of God as πατήρ. Marianne Thompson, in her recent work on God in the Gospel of John, argues that the Hebrew idea of God in covenant relationship to Israel is mediated through a direct relationship between God and the king. This relationship is pictured as one between a father and a son (Ps 2:6-8).<sup>57</sup> The community of God, then, is in relationship to God as the father because of God's proclamation of the king as "my Son." It is very well known that Ps 2:6-8 plays a significant role in the baptismal scene in Mark, and underlies the transfiguration scene of Mark 9 in which

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid., 52.

<sup>56</sup> On the inclusive nature of the meal Anderson (*Mark*, 313-314) states, "The solitary narrative detail that intrudes in the description of Jesus' actions and words, **they all drank of it**, could have been a reminder to the Church that all, however reprobate (even the betrayer?), were admitted to the fellowship of Jesus and were offered the mercy and love of God in and through him."

<sup>57</sup> Marianne M. Thompson, *The God of the Gospel of John* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 63.

God proclaims Jesus as “my Son.”<sup>58</sup> Thus, as was argued throughout the discussion of Christology, Jesus is portrayed as the Son of God in Mark, and here at the table, with the twelve who will become the new community of God, Jesus stands as the Son through whom God’s relational covenant is mediated, and by which God enters into relationship with the new community as πατήρ.

It is Jesus’ death that will bring this covenant to fruition, as he himself interprets through the re-defining of the significance of the elements. Moreover, by his covenant-establishing death, Jesus will be taking his rightful place as Son, and will make way for a new community to receive the inheritance from God. One can see that the parable of the vineyard (Mark 12) fits nicely with this idea. The caretakers have failed in their agreement with the landowner. After several attempts to send servants to seek his claim, the landowner will send his only son (υἱὸν ἀγαπητόν; 12:6), who will be killed by the caretakers, who assume the son has come to claim his right to the land. As Donahue rightly shows, the focus of the parable is the rhetorical question of v.9, “What then will the owner of the vineyard do?”<sup>59</sup> This question is directed at the characters in the narrative, but also to the audience of Mark’s Gospel. The question, however, is answered by the Markan Jesus who states that the landowner will come and destroy the tenants and will give the vineyard to “others.” The use of ἄλλοις does not specify to whom the vineyard is given, but the audience would most likely associate this reference with those who would act rightly as new tenants over the vineyard. Thus, the Markan audience who hears this parable as a metaphor of God’s judgment on Israel’s leaders, would most likely associate the designation ἄλλοις to be those who do the will of God. The judgment and destruction of the first tenants is replaced by a new agreement with the new caretakers, and the new caretakers are those in relationship to God. The means by which this land is given to the others is the death of the Son.

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<sup>58</sup> See esp. Joel Marcus, *The Way of the Lord: Christological Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Gospel of Mark* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1993), 51-56, 59-69.

<sup>59</sup> John R. Donahue, *The Gospel in Parable* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1988), 52-56.

Understanding the actions of Jesus at the Passover meal in light of the parable as an illustration of the coming and death of Jesus, guides the Markan audience to see the covenant as that which gives them the new inheritance from God. The intimacy of the group apart from the religious establishment of Israel, the redefining of the elements according to Jesus, and the implementing of God's covenant with the new community, shifts God's relationship to the new discipleship community of God. God's chosen son is no longer Israel, but Jesus. God's chosen people are no longer solely Israel, but those who follow the beloved Son. It is through the covenant that God calls a new people, and becomes πατήρ of those who follow the υἱός.

Mark, however, also holds out the idea that though it seems that God is taking the initiative to establish covenant and community with those who follow the beloved Son, there is also a degree of initiative on the part of disciples to come into community with God. Jesus' initial preaching of the coming kingdom, calls the nation to repent (μετανοεῖτε) and believe (πιστεύετε) in the gospel of God. As I argued in my discussion of the presentation of God in 1:14-15, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ seems to be in parallel relationship with the phrase ἡ βασιλεία τοῦ θεοῦ.<sup>60</sup> Moreover, when the Markan Jesus calls people to repent and believe in the gospel, the audience would certainly fill in the gap and think "gospel of God." This being the case, Jesus calls people to participate in that which God is accomplishing mainly through Jesus' actions throughout the narrative. But this call also extends to the audience of Mark's narrative, calling them to participate in what God had begun in the ministry of Jesus and continues on into their contemporary situation.

Given that God's actions in the narrative world extend to the audience of Mark's narrative, the Markan audience is called into relationship with God, one that reflects Jesus' own relationship with God. As the Beloved Son was sent to proclaim the kingdom and gospel of God, so those who follow Jesus proclaim the kingdom and gospel of God; they are co-workers with Jesus. Indeed the genitive is obscure

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<sup>60</sup> This may very well be the reason scribes had the tendency to change the original εὐαγγέλιον to βασιλείας.

and may be taken to be either objective or subjective or both.<sup>61</sup> As argued earlier, the ambiguity may be intentional. The gospel then, is both from and about God's coming into the world to gather a new people with whom God will establish relationship. The fact that the call is issued with a choice inherent in the call implies the human involvement in this relationship.

Moreover, in 9:37, Jesus gives one of the most important statements in the narrative, linking theology, Christology, and discipleship. The language fits the idea of social welcoming and hospitality in the first century, which would have been extended to friends and family.<sup>62</sup> The child, possibly representing the fellow believer<sup>63</sup>, is welcomed by other followers of Jesus. But in carrying out this action, believers also welcome Jesus and the one who sent Jesus, God. Thus implied in this is the new community of believers who welcome one another, the Son, and God. The initiative to welcome, then, is the believer's, who welcomes other believers in community, and therefore welcomes Jesus and the God who sent Jesus.

The importance of the motif of relationship is clear in Mark's narrative. As Jesus is the beloved Son of God, so God is presented as the πατήρ-αββὰ of Jesus and of those who follow Jesus. In this sense, the disciples in Mark's audience are participants with Jesus in his relationship to God. Through their own baptism, the Markan audience is brought into relationship with God. The relationship language not only includes that which suggests a familial relationship between God and the disciples, but also the language of covenant, suggesting the naissance of a new community in which believers are welcomed in the name of Jesus, and they in turn welcome the Son of God and the God who sent him. This relationship motif functions for the Markan audience as a replacement for their natural kinship groups, who may have abandoned them and even "handed them over" to authorities on

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<sup>61</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 172.

<sup>62</sup> Bruce J. Malina & Richard L. Rohrbaugh, *Social Science Commentary on the Synoptic Gospels* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 237; Craig A. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20* (Dallas: Word, 2001), 62.

<sup>63</sup> On this see Hurtado (Larry W. Hurtado, *Mark* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1983], 153) who suggests that "in my name" implies that the child to whom Jesus refers is the fellow servant. Evans, *Mark 8:27-16:20*, 62 sees this saying in a context of mission, and the terminology of welcoming in the name of Jesus supports this.

account of their faith (13:9-13). Thus, the discipleship community of Mark's audience understands that discipleship is not tied solely to how a disciple relates to Jesus, but ultimately how the discipleship community is in relation to God.

*The Discipleship Community and Faith in God*

As Christopher D. Marshall has demonstrated, faith is a particularly important motif in Mark.<sup>64</sup> The word πίστις occurs 19 times in Mark, 14 in the verb form, and 5 in its noun form. Moreover, as we have already seen, Jesus' stance of faith is noteworthy, as the portrayal of Jesus as a person of faith serves the narrative purpose of presenting Jesus as the paradigm of discipleship.

What is important at this point in the discussion is not only Jesus' example of faith, but his call to the characters in the narrative to have faith. These commands to have faith must assuredly extend to the Markan audience, pointing them to God as the object of their faith. The call to have faith (πιστεύετε) in τῷ εὐαγγελίῳ (1:15) is a call to have faith in τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ (1:14), the good news that Jesus preaches from and about God. Moreover, although the divine initiative is at the fore of the narrative, the response of faith must also be present.<sup>65</sup> The response of faith to Jesus' proclamation is then a response to the dynamic present rule of God being executed in the coming of Jesus. Thus any character who responds to Jesus' invitation expresses faith in God's present activity.

These characters would of course include the twelve who are called to follow Jesus and to be with him (1:14-20; 3:13-19). But their initial response to Jesus' call does not preclude them from being called to have faith in God, particularly at significant points of testing. A serious threat against the disciples in the narrative comes in 4:35ff when the sudden storm engulfs the boat in which Jesus and the twelve are travelling across the lake. The urgency of the situation is obvious, as the disciples perceive that death is imminent, and that their sleeping Master does not

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<sup>64</sup> Christopher D. Marshall, *Faith as a Theme in Mark's Narrative* (SNTSMS 64; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 536.

express concern whatsoever. Jesus, however, awakened by the frightened twelve does express anger at the faithlessness of these followers who have witnessed the power of God at work in him. His piercing question, "Have you still no faith?" pushes the disciples to be silent before him, yet question to themselves concerning who this man is (4:40).

As I demonstrated earlier, although this story does have christological implications, the calmness of Jesus over against the frantic disciples puts Jesus forward as a model of what it means to have faith in the unseen God. The disciples, although called to be with Jesus, thus expressing faith in God's rule present in him, have yet to grasp the depth of faith needed to endure trials. Given this understanding of faith in this passage, the story speaks to the Markan audience concerning faith that is needed to endure trials and testings. If, as I have continually suggested, the Markan audience is experiencing persecution, or at least the great potential for persecution, this story calls them to a deeper faith; a faith that God's rule extends beyond the community to the powers that exist outside.<sup>66</sup>

While not equally dramatic, Jesus' call to have faith in God in 11:22 also responds to the weakness of the disciples, this time pictured in Peter. The sandwich structure of 11:12-24 draws a parallel between what Jesus does to the fig tree and what his actions in the temple symbolise. The call for Peter to "have faith in God" is in response to Peter's viewing the now withered fig tree that Jesus had cursed.<sup>67</sup> The reason for Jesus directing Peter to have faith in God is possibly implied in the saying of 11:23-25. This saying addresses prayer, which was Jesus' concern in the temple (11:17). Moreover, he is concerned about prayer within a community where forgiveness must be sought by members of the community in order to make prayer

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<sup>66</sup> I remind the reader of the earlier discussion of Jesus' use of ἐπιτιμᾶω, where we discovered its similarity to his response to evil spirits. Given this, and the ancient Jewish belief that the sea storm was caused by evil spirits, the audience most probably could correlate the story with their own as they face the powers.

<sup>67</sup> On taking ἔχετε πίστιν Θεοῦ as the original reading without the particle εἰ see Dowd, *Prayer*, 59. Dowd, 60-62, also gives good support to reading ἔχετε as indicative, and Θεοῦ as an objective genitive.



effective.<sup>68</sup> Jesus' saying on prayer looks to a new praying community of the people of God outside the religious establishment of the temple. Thus, we may propose that when Peter points to the withered tree, Jesus sees the cursed temple. The characterisation of Peter continues to show him as not understanding the significance and symbolism of the withered tree. Yet Jesus is presented as fully understanding, and indeed acting out, the present activity of God.<sup>69</sup> Part of this activity is the termination of the temple authority, while the other is the establishment of a new community of faith. If we take Jesus' words against the tree as a prayer, and also as a symbolic cursing of the temple, then we understand the "demise of the temple as an act of God."<sup>70</sup>

The Markan audience, perhaps living in temporal proximity to the temple's destruction, may very well express the sentiment of Peter in responding to Jesus' action in the temple. "If the temple is no longer the place of prayer and divine action, what will we do?" The answer lies in Jesus' words to "have faith in God." The type of faith required is the faith that can move mountains. This faith is not based in human activity or originating in human achievement, but in the power and activity of God.<sup>71</sup>

In this pericope, then, we find the issue of faith and the means of expression through which faith is to be exercised by the new community of God, prayer.<sup>72</sup> The temple as a house of prayer is replaced by the new community of faith and prayer. But prayer in Mark must always align the believer to the will of God. The community of God and Jesus are those who "do the will of God." Moreover, Jesus' own prayer in 14:36 exhibits the proper function of prayer and stance of faith in God. The prayer stands as a model for the praying community of faith, for Jesus calls out

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<sup>68</sup> On the various ways the prayer logion in Mark 11:25 has been interpreted see Dowd, *Prayer*, 123-129.

<sup>69</sup> On the characterisation of Peter here see Dowd (*Prayer*, 58) who states that while Peter calls the action against the tree a "curse" (κατηράσω), the audience should understand Jesus' words as a prayer.

<sup>70</sup> Marshall, *Faith*, 169.

<sup>71</sup> While we understand θεοῦ to be an objective genitive, it may be possible also to take it as subjective, that is faith which is supplied by God.

<sup>72</sup> Marshall, *Faith*, 170.

in faith to his  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$ , but his faith is in both the care and power of God to release him from the suffering to come and the faith that God's will, whatever it may be, is to be followed. His composure at this point is due to his reliance on the Spirit of God as opposed to the disciples' reliance on human strength.<sup>73</sup> The pericope of 11:12-25 is closely related to the scene of Jesus' garden prayer. Both are concerned with the uncertainty of the future. The disciples' concern is over the demise of the temple, while Jesus' concern is over his impending suffering. Yet both contain the motif of faith expressed through prayer, as well as the presentation of God as the one who can do the seemingly impossible.

It is possible also to view the words of the Markan Jesus in 9:29 along these same lines. The narrative context is the healing of a possessed boy. Jesus and the three disciples return from the mountain to find a frantic father whose son is under the power of an unclean spirit. The father expresses anger because of the impotence of the disciples to cast the spirit out of the boy. Again, the issue for both the disciples and the father is faith. Jesus calls on the father to have faith. As before, we can take this to be faith in the power of God to work in and through Jesus to accomplish the release of the boy. The success of Jesus to cast out the spirit fades to the background as the dumb-founded disciples ask, "Why could we not cast it out?" Jesus does not directly answer their question. He is not concerned to tell them whether they could or could not. His answer implies that the prayer of faith is the power source to cast out unclean spirits. Again, the juxtaposition of prayer and faith in the same story focuses the audience on the power source, and calls them to confront evil spirits through prayers of faith.

The Markan audience is addressed through these stories to understand that the faith that Jesus has in his God to overcome the evil spirits that bring havoc on God's people is the faith that is available to them. This faith is not available to them apart from Jesus, but only through and with Jesus. As the father is reliant on Jesus to have this kind of faith, so the audience of Mark is reliant on their relationship to Jesus and his God for this type of faith. The narrative upshot for the Markan community who

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<sup>73</sup> On taking  $\piνεῦμα$  in 14:38 as indicating the Spirit of God, see the previous discussion of this passage in chapter 3 and the more thorough discussion later in this chapter.

connect these pericopes of faith is that faith is expressed through prayer offered to the God of Jesus. Prayer is a call to God to act, as well as a resolve to align oneself to the will of God. Faith is required for one to trust in the Spirit of God to empower one to face the uncertain future and the evil powers that seek to destroy.

*The Discipleship Community and the Proclamation of the Gospel of God and the Kingdom of God*

Among the many characteristics that distinguish Mark's narrative from Matthew and Luke is the absence of a post-resurrection commissioning story in which Jesus gives instruction regarding the future proclamation of the gospel. Jesus does not appear post-resurrection to give the final call to evangelise the nations, nor does he appear to promise the coming of the Spirit. It would be erroneous to assume, however, that the lack of such an ending implies that Mark's narrative is not concerned with the further proclamation of God's reign and gospel.<sup>74</sup>

To begin, the introductory statement of the narrative, 'Ἀρχὴ τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ (1:1), can be understood as both the introduction to the prologue of Mark, as well as the entire writing.<sup>75</sup> The designation of this writing as εὐαγγέλιον indicates to the audience that the very writing and reading of this story is a proclamation of Jesus' gospel in their very hearing. Thus the proclamation extends into the presence of Mark's audience. But what is the nature of this εὐαγγέλιον?<sup>76</sup>

The question can be answered by interpreting the function of the genitive τοῦ εὐαγγελίου Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ. While the objective genitive is the most favoured reading by most commentators, others are willing to concede that the subjective may

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<sup>74</sup> On the dubious endings to Mark, see the footnote on this discussion in chapter 3.

<sup>75</sup> Marcus, *Mark*, 143.

<sup>76</sup> I am not seeking to enter the debate over genre. I find agreement with Boring who argues that εὐαγγέλιον in v1 is not the content of Mark as discourse, or a genre designation, but the content of the whole story of Jesus, "the contents and subject matter of Mark's narrative as a whole." M. Eugene Boring, "Mark 1:1-15 and the Beginning of the Gospel," *Semeia* 52 (1990): 51.

also be implied.<sup>77</sup> The gospel that Mark “preaches” is certainly about Jesus, but it is also the gospel that Jesus himself will preach in the narrative. Furthermore, the use of καθὼς in v2 serves to link the Hebrew Bible quotations in 1:2-3 with v1. Verses 2-3 introduce the audience to the intention of God, spelled out in the prophet Isaiah, to send forth God’s messenger to prepare “the way of the Lord.” Καθὼς points backwards to the promises of God made through Isaiah and forward to the fulfilling of these promises in the coming of John and Jesus, who will serve as messengers of God’s final action in history. The syntactical link with v1, created by the use of καθὼς, implies that the former promises of God, which are now coming to fruition, are the content of the gospel that is from Jesus the Messiah.

This may be further supported by Marcus’ recognition that the use of ἀρχὴ in 1:1 carries a temporal sense indicating that Mark’s narrative is only the *beginning* of the gospel of Jesus Christ, and this gospel continues in the life of the church.<sup>78</sup> Thus, the gospel that is from Jesus, the gospel of God Jesus preaches and lives, begins in the Markan narrative and extends into the life of Mark’s audience. The proclamation of the Markan characters and the Markan audience all follow Jesus’ preaching.

Moreover, what Jesus will proclaim in the narrative is the coming kingdom of God and the gospel of God. As I argued in chapter 2, τὸ εὐαγγέλιον τοῦ θεοῦ should be taken, as the genitive in 1:1 is, as objective and subjective. The gospel is from God, given to Jesus to proclaim, and about God, the content of Jesus’ message that the dynamic rule of God is coming. It is Jesus’ own proclamation that defines what the gospel is; the fulfilling of God’s promises in God’s present and future action.

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<sup>77</sup> Guelich, *Mark*, 9 is adamant that one must choose one of these readings, and he opts for the objective sense. See Guelich for a list of the various ways the genitive has been understood. For more recent treatments, see, Marcus, *Mark*, 146-147; Richard T. France, *The Gospel of Mark* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 53, who both argue that both meanings may be present.

<sup>78</sup> Marcus, *Ibid.*, 141, 146. On the different understandings of ἀρχὴ see Boring, “Mark 1:1-15,” 52-53.

Clearly the calling of the disciples reported in chapter 3 of Mark, in which they are appointed to proclaim the message (ἵνα ἀποστέλλῃ αὐτοὺς κηρύσσειν; 3:14), is a calling in which they are to participate in Jesus' own mission of proclaiming the gospel. To this point in the narrative κηρύσσειν has only been used to speak about Jesus' ministry (1:14; 38-39). Here in 3:13-19, the audience gets the first apparent clue that Jesus will not carry out this ministry alone. This idea is furthered in 6:7-13 where the narrator says that Jesus "called the twelve and began to send them out" (6:7). This, in Mark, is the first clue that Jesus' ministry of proclaiming the rule and gospel of God is now becoming the ministry of those who follow him. However, their message is the message which Jesus also proclaimed, one of repentance (καὶ ἐξελθόντες ἐκήρυξαν ἵνα μετανοῶσιν; 6:12; cf. 1:14-15) in preparation of God's coming.

Supporting further the idea that the Markan audience is to participate in the proclamation of the gospel of God and the kingdom of God are the references Jesus makes regarding those who are ashamed of the gospel. In 8:34-38, Jesus teaches on discipleship and tells his audience that "those" who seek salvation must lose their lives, and those who choose to do so for his sake, "and for the sake of the gospel, will save it" (8:36). He adds to this by stating that the Son of Man will be ashamed of those who are ashamed of him and his words (τοὺς ἐμοὺς λόγους; 8:38) in this generation. The parallel positions of εὐαγγελίου and λόγους indicate the relationship of these two terms: the gospel is the word Jesus preaches and teaches in the Markan narrative. The employment of ὅς as a reference to those who wish to save their lives, leaves the prospects undefined, and therefore, points toward those beyond the listening audience of Jesus, to those in Mark's audience. The implicit message is that those who are not ashamed are the ones who will proclaim the gospel that is from Jesus.

Mark 13:9-13 is a pericope in which Jesus speaks to his disciples concerning persecution, but it also stands as a communiqué to the Markan audience of the

possible persecution to come to all those who follow Jesus.<sup>79</sup> These verses form a concentric pattern, with vv. 10-11 functioning as the centre of the passage.<sup>80</sup> Verse 10 serves to make known the necessity of proclaiming the gospel, and verse 11 functions as the means of power through which the proclamation is made. The presence of δεῖ indicates that this gospel proclamation to all nations (πάντα τὰ ἔθνη) is of divine necessity and therefore part of God's unfolding will for the audience of Mark's narrative. Despite the extreme likelihood of persecutions, the audience is called to proclaim the gospel of God in imitation of Jesus' own proclamation. Indeed, persecution may come as a result of faithful proclamation, following the pattern of Jesus' own life in the narrative. To encourage them in their efforts, the promise of God's power through the Spirit is given as a means of eloquence. The audience at this point may be reminded of the coming of the Spirit onto Jesus, his immediate confrontation with the evil powers in the wilderness, and the narration of his proclaiming the coming of God's rule and the gospel of God. The Spirit-empowered preacher of the gospel now gives instruction to those who will be proclaiming this gospel after his own departure, and he gives encouragement that the Spirit that has empowered his preaching will indeed be the one who speaks through them. Though the taking away of the Son of Man is imminent, those left are called to carry forth the proclamation initiated in Jesus' own ministry. The audience is implicitly called by the Markan Jesus to participate in the further proclamation of the kingdom of God and the gospel of God.

The worldwide proclamation of the gospel is implied in the words of the narrative Jesus in response to the anointing by the woman in 14:3-9.<sup>81</sup> While the thrust of Jesus' statement in v9 is upon the future memorial of the woman's action, the saying clearly indicates that the gospel of God will continue to be proclaimed, and will incorporate the present activity of God in the coming of the Son, whose death and resurrection personifies God's action in the world of Mark's audience.

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<sup>79</sup> Helen R. Graham, "A Passion Prediction for Mark's Community: Mark 13:9-13," *BTB* 16 (1986): 18-22.

<sup>80</sup> See van Iersel, *Mark*, 396, 398.

<sup>81</sup> Gnllka, *Markus*, 2:225-226.



What also may be at the heart of this action and saying of Jesus is the coalescing of proclamation and ethics in response to the present activity of God. The woman's deed is not only an act of service given to Jesus, but it also may be understood as a response to the present divine action. It is striking that this is the final occurrence of Jesus' words concerning the proclamation of the εὐαγγέλιον, and it is the only place in the narrative where a character, and particularly a minor character, gives service to Jesus. Thus, the impending death of Jesus and the proclamation of the gospel are forever inseparably linked with the ethics of service in the kingdom of God. Consequently, the Markan audience is called both to proclaim the gospel of God's dynamic activity and rule, and to live under that activity and rule as an essential part of their proclamation.

*The Discipleship Community and the Ethics of God's Present Activity*

The audience has heard the narrative open with the coming of God. The messenger sent from God is commissioned to "prepare the way of the Lord," and as I argued at the start, the use of κύριος in 1:3 may be a reference to God, or at least implying both Jesus and God. Moreover, the audience sees in the story of Jesus' baptism the splitting of the heavens, the descent of God's Spirit onto Jesus, and the heavenly voice affirming the relationship God has with Jesus. This experience leads Jesus to proclaim that the rule of God is now present in the world, and the audience associates his preaching in 1:14-15 as connected with and emanating from the experience of the baptism.

This experience on the part of the audience assists them in hearing Jesus' words and actions throughout the narrative as pointing to this coming of God in kingly power. The miracles, as we witnessed, demonstrate this reality in the story. Moreover, Jesus' authoritative teaching is focused on God's present rule. The issue for us in this chapter is to determine how the audience understands its own response to this teaching. If it is determined that the Markan Jesus' teaching and preaching is focused on the present activity of God, which we have claimed in the previous chapter, then logically the ethic that is laid out in Mark is one focused on God's present activity. Thus, discipleship is a response to God's present activity in the

narrative world of Mark, and communicates to the audience what living in the kingdom ought to be.

There is a danger here to assume too quickly that this is an entirely new ethic. This seems not to be the case in Mark. Much of what Jesus teaches in Mark, as we will see, is based in the Hebrew Bible, and therefore cannot be considered entirely new. However, it seems very reasonable that the present activity of God in the coming of Jesus as the authoritative teacher is new, and that at the very least the ethic that Jesus communicates and the current norm of Israel's faith are poles apart. I am not making a postulation concerning the setting of the Markan audience and the conflict that might have been present within that community, *à la* Weeden and Kelber. Rather, I am arguing that the narrative plot of conflict between Jesus and others, particularly the religious leaders, leads the audience to judge one as more authoritative than the other (cf. 1:22, 27), and thus the ethic that he proclaims is distinct, and in some sense new (cf. 2:21-22).<sup>82</sup> But this conflict is not limited to Jesus' debates with the religious leaders. Some of the conflict Jesus encounters is with his disciples, due mainly to their misunderstanding.<sup>83</sup> This theme of conflict, however, serves to show the Markan audience what ought to be in the present activity of God and not what might currently be the norm within a Markan audience. In other words, Mark's story of God's activity through the coming of Jesus is meant to present an alternative world of ethical living, one in which followers of the risen Christ are to live in the present activity of God.

In the following discussion I will elicit ethical themes in Mark and seek to demonstrate how these themes relate to the presentation of God in Mark.<sup>84</sup> More specifically, for the purposes of this thesis, this argument will make evident that

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<sup>82</sup> On this see Joanna Dewey, (*Markan Public Debate: Literary Technique, Concentric Structure and Theology in Mark 2:1-3:6* [SBLDS 48; Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1980], 93), who points out that a close reading of 2:21-22, and indeed the pericope of 2:1-3:6 indicates that the new and old will not mix. The new has come to replace the old.

<sup>83</sup> On conflict in Mark see Kingsbury, *Conflict in Mark*, and now especially Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*.

<sup>84</sup> On ethics in Mark see esp. Howard C. Kee, *Community of the New Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1977), 145-175 and Dan O. Via, *The Ethics of Mark's Gospel- In the Middle of Time* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1985). Also helpful is Richard Hays, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament* (New York: Harper Collins, 1996), esp. 73-92.

these teachings present the ethics of Mark within the context of the presentation of God. A narrative-theological reading of Mark will extract an ethical scheme in Mark that understands ethics as deriving from God's own character in the narrative.

While Mark is absent of extensive commandments of love, as found in John's Gospel, the narrative is not totally void of love as the ethic of God's activity.<sup>85</sup> To be sure, the Markan narrative ethic is very much dependent on the presentation of God in the narrative.

Again, the baptismal scene of 1:9-11 stands as the beginning point of our discussion. Here the divine voice proclaims Jesus as "my beloved son" (ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός). This is further echoed in the transfiguration (9:7) and in the parable of the vineyard (12:6). The designation expresses the unique relationship Jesus has to God, and surely God has to Jesus. Christology and theology are intertwined. The use of this expression to characterize this relationship communicates the love God has for the Son. Moreover, the prayer in the garden, in which Jesus calls out to God as αββα, makes it likely that the love relationship between Jesus and God is at the heart of Mark's narrative. This has ethical implications for the Markan audience.

Having experienced their own baptism as participation with Jesus' commitment to the divine will, the Markan audience would surely understand God's love for them. The divine voice at Jesus' baptism serves as their own confirmation of God's love for those who commit themselves to the will of God expressed through baptism. While the use of ὁ υἱός μου ὁ ἀγαπητός indicates that Jesus is the unique Son of God, those who participate in his baptism are brought into relationship with the God of Jesus and experience the divine love and approval. Thus, these baptised believers are thrust into the kingdom of God, in which love of God and one's neighbour are of central importance.

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<sup>85</sup> For a discussion which argues that Mark does not have a love ethic see Hays, *Moral Vision*, 200, 205 n24. I am in agreement with Hays' view, but only to the extent that we must recognise that Mark is not completely void of an ethic of love. Hays seeks to show that Mark's ethic/discipleship is found in Jesus' command to take up the cross. Yet, by arguing this, Hays sees only one aspect of ethics in Mark, much like those who would see Mark's ethic as one of love alone. My thesis is that love is only part of the ethics of Mark's narrative, and this love must be within the context of divine love in the kingdom of God.

The love commandment that Jesus gives in 12:28-34 is in response to the questioning of a scribe who heard him “answer well” the questions of others. Sanders pushes too far the form and structure of this pericope by concluding that what is at stake in this exchange is the authority of Jesus in scriptural interpretation. It is true that Jesus is presented here as having greater authority in teaching and interpretation. Since this is the case, then what is stated must be taken to be important and normative. Sanders concludes that Mark does not consider the love commandment as an ethical norm.<sup>86</sup> But Sanders misses the implication of Jesus’ answer to the scribe’s question, “Which commandment is first of all?” In response Jesus answers that the first commandment is to love God, echoing the *Shema* recited three times daily by pious Jews. Yet Jesus goes beyond the specific question to include as part of his answer the command to love one’s neighbour as oneself. His designations, first and second, however, should not be seen as a prioritising of the commitment believers are to have, but they point out that in the present activity of God, the love of neighbour is wedded to the love of God; the two are inseparable.<sup>87</sup> One who seeks to do the will of God cannot love God and not love his or her neighbour. To be sure, this can work in the reverse. One cannot love one’s neighbour to the full extent apart from loving God with all one’s heart, soul, mind, and strength.<sup>88</sup> Accordingly the love that is spoken of here is not a human love, but a divine love that one can only express and receive within the context of God’s present rule.

The scribe affirms Jesus’ answer, and Jesus in turn affirms the scribe’s proximity to the kingdom of God, οὐ μακρὰν εἶ ἀπὸ τῆς βασιλείας τοῦ θεοῦ (12:34). But what does Jesus’ statement indicate? Can one be “not far” from the kingdom, and still fall short of entering? If so, what must be done to enter fully into the kingdom of God?

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<sup>86</sup> Jack T. Sanders, *Ethics in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 32.

<sup>87</sup> Victor P. Furnish, *The Love Commandment in the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1972), 26-29. Via, *Ethics of Mark’s Gospel*, 85

<sup>88</sup> Via, *Ethics of Mark’s Gospel*, 86 makes a similar point.

An answer may be found when the audience understands this scribe as a foil for the rich man who seeks eternal life (10:17-22), but who cannot meet the demands required by Jesus, to sell all his possessions and give to the poor.<sup>89</sup> Both men seek something from Jesus, and both requests are for something not of the present world. The rich man defends his integrity as a law abider who is deserving of eternal life (10:20).<sup>90</sup> But in the present rule of God, Jesus calls him to radical obedience. The rich man turns away unable to part with his possessions. The scribe of 12:28-34, however, has “answered wisely” (νουνεχῶς ἀπεκρίθη), and he is not far from the present rule of God. Nevertheless what is left is his *obedience* to these commands. Knowledge of the will of God is not the ethic of the kingdom; only *doing* the will of God meets this requirement. Understanding needs to be met with action in the present activity of the one and only God, the God of the living (12:27). Love in action is required.

The absence of any christological point in this exchange, other than Jesus as the authoritative teacher and interpreter of scripture, shows the intent of the narrative to point to the ethic of love of neighbour to be bound to the love of the one God of Israel. But the narrative presentation of the love ethic communicates to the Markan audience that community love derives from the love of the one living God who has expressed love to Jesus, ὁ υἱὸς ὁ ἀγαπητός. This love, however, is not expressed in mere proclamation, but in deed, as God vindicates Jesus in the resurrection. Thus, community love among the followers of Jesus derives from the very character of God as presented in Mark, and involves acts of service that express love (9:41; 10:35-45).

It might also be observed that the narrative whole of Mark suggests that love of neighbour extends beyond the new community to those outside the community, as Via rightly points out.<sup>91</sup> Yet, even an ethic of love toward non-believers derives from God's own love in action. The preparation of the “way of the Lord” spoken of in 1:3 is the indication of God's coming, and the tearing of the heavens at the

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<sup>89</sup> Van Iersel *Mark*, 380.

<sup>90</sup> Kee, *Community of the New Age*, 154.

<sup>91</sup> Via, *Ethics of Mark's Gospel*, 86.

baptism indicates that God has invaded the human realm of Mark's narrative.

Initially, one might assume that this is an apocalyptic coming in judgment, and to be sure it is a coming in victory over evil. The arrival of the rule of God means the end of the rule of evil, and Jesus' actions on behalf of God in healing and exorcising demons implies this victory. But the call to believe in the gospel of God, and to enter the kingdom of God, is a call to embrace the coming of God; and Jesus' own action of inclusiveness, that is his unprejudiced mission to all, reveals an ethic of love for those who are called.<sup>92</sup>

Inclusiveness is an essential part of the ethic of divine love in Mark. Mark's Christology is a narrative presentation of Jesus who acts on behalf of God, and in his actions he extends to the ritually impure the cleansing only given by divine action.<sup>93</sup> This cleansing is given to those on the outside of the religious formalism: tax collectors and sinners (2:15-17), a bleeding woman (5:24-34), and those possessed by unclean spirits (1:21-28; 5:1-20; 7:24-30; 9:14-29). Moreover, the inclusion of women in the ministry, and the entrustment of women with the message of resurrection, displays an inclusiveness that crosses the gender barriers inherent in Second Temple Judaism.

This idea is carried further into the pericope of 2:13-17, where Jesus eats with "sinners and tax collectors." The portrait of Jesus at the table partaking of a meal foreshadows the last meal Jesus will have with his closet friends, when he will speak the words over the cup and bread, defining his death as the institution of a new covenant. The meals taken in these passages, as well as the feeding stories in 6:34-44 and 8:1-10, quite possibly reflect the common meals shared by early believers, including those in Mark's audience.<sup>94</sup> Thus Mark's narration of these meals may

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<sup>92</sup> So also Via, *Ethics in Mark's Gospel*, 86. Via lists Jesus' contacts with children (9:35-42), people from Gentile areas (3:7-12; 5:1-20), and the healing the daughter of the Syro-Phoenician woman (7:24-30). We might add to this the suggestion that although Mark may have been written for a primarily Gentile audience, there seems not to be an anti-Semitic overtone in Mark. The Markan Jesus also extends compassion to those who are Jews. Thus, any hint of anti-Semitism in the audience of Mark is dispelled, and the command to love is a command to love all.

<sup>93</sup> See the discussion in the previous chapter.

<sup>94</sup> On meals in early Christianity see Luke T. Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 137-179.



suggest the communal intimacy of the early church, especially in the context of worship. The conflict between Jesus and the religious leaders over the inclusion of sinners and tax collectors in the meal occurring in 2:13-17 may imply to Mark's audience the ethic that ought to be in the community, the welcoming of the outcast and marginalized into the intimacy of the new covenantal community. Jesus' logia declaring that the sick are in need of a doctor implies that those of disrepute are in greater need for community, and more importantly community that is forgiving and accepting. The ethic of God's present activity in the narrative, and in the Markan audience, is one of inclusive, intimate, and restorative community. The kingdom of God, then, may here be seen as a meal in which people from all walks of life are called to share in the intimacy of table fellowship with the faithful of God.

Jesus attacks the exclusive actions of his own disciples in 9:38-41. John, in what may be taken as self-seeking praise, reports to Jesus his action of preventing someone from exorcising demons "because he was not following us" (ὅτι οὐκ ἠκολούθει ἡμῖν; 9:38). Jesus refuses this exclusion, and commands John not to stop him. John seems to fail on two parts. First, John puts himself in the place of authority that only the appointed Son, Jesus is divinely recognised as taking. Second, he assumes that doers of the will of God must be members of the community of Jesus and the twelve. Yet Jesus has already defined true members of his family as "whoever does the will of God", that is anyone who seeks to live under the rule of God.

Even Jesus' action in the temple must be viewed as expressing the inclusiveness of God's covenant community as those in charge of the temple are guilty of ignoring the divine purpose for the temple to be "a house of prayer for all the nations (πᾶσιν τοῖς ἔθνεσιν; [11:17]). The use of the Isaiah text (Isa 56:7 LXX) envisions the divine purpose of the temple as a place of inclusive worship of the one God of Israel by all people. The temple leadership was guilty of preventing this, but the narrative implies to the Markan audience that inclusive worship of God has come. Moreover, if the Markan audience is primarily thought of as Gentile, or even mixed, the inclusive tone of Jesus' statement stands as a noteworthy word

giving assurance of God's inclusive character and the community as reflecting that character.<sup>95</sup> The audience is in turn compelled to seek continually to be the inclusive new community.

It is not surprising, then, that Jesus' teaching on prayer in 11:22-25 would seem so crucial to Mark's audience. These verses must be understood in light of the demise of the temple as a place of worship, making the place of prayer not "these great buildings" (13:2), but a temple "not made with human hands" (14:58). The temple will become non-existent, and in the hearing of the Markan audience, possibly already non-existent, making the new realm of prayer in the community itself. Moreover, prayer, as Jesus speaks of it here, must be preceded by forgiveness offered to others, "so that (ἵνα) your Father in heaven may also forgive your trespasses" (11:25). This statement reminds the audience that divine forgiveness necessitates forgiveness within the community. Hence the ethic implied in the Markan narrative, to be lived in the Markan audience, is dependent on the divine ethic. Divine love, acceptance and forgiveness are linked to the love, acceptance, and forgiveness within the community. In effect, love, inclusiveness, and forgiveness are only possible because of the divine love, inclusiveness, and forgiveness exhibited in God's present action. As much as God empowers the community to "say to this mountain" (11:23), so God empowers the community to love and forgive.

This divine ethic also calls for a subversive reversal of status within the new covenantal community. The invasion of God into the narrative world of Mark brings challenge to the rule of power. The proclamation that God's dynamic rule has arrived sets forth the demise of the power of evil, evidenced in the miracles of Jesus. But this demise is not limited to the evil of the spirit realm, as the human authorities that carry out abusive power and evil against the Son of Man, will see the Son of Man coming in glory. Moreover, the final act of the narrative is the act of God, which answers their power and evil by raising Jesus from the dead.

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<sup>95</sup> John R. Donahue (*The Gospel of Mark* [Collegeville: The Liturgical Press, 2002], 328) notes the significant impact Jesus' statement would have on an audience that included Gentiles.

The community of God called by Jesus is, therefore, to be a community in which the human idea of authority is cast out and replaced by a new ethic of service. The cultural symbol of Roman power and domination, the cross, now becomes the symbol of service in the community (8:34)<sup>96</sup>, and the pattern of lordship practices among the ἔθνη are to be replaced by the service demonstrated by the Son of Man, who gives his life as a ransom for the many (10:32-45). Disciples are called to imitate and participate with the Son of Man in service, as the use of καὶ γάρ communicates.<sup>97</sup> One who seeks to be great in the present rule of God, then, must become a servant (διάκονος) of all (9:35; 10:43) and a slave (δοῦλος) of all (10:44). Service in the present rule of God, then, is viewed as true greatness, and Jesus and some interesting minor characters in Mark are emblematic of this new ethic of service.

Peter's mother-in-law, after being healed by Jesus, begins to "serve (διηκόνει) them" (1:31). The verb διακονέω is used in Mark only in reference to the angels who come to serve Jesus after the temptation in the wilderness (1:13), to describe the women who used to follow Jesus and "serve" him (15:41), and Jesus' own explanation for his coming, "not to be served (διακονηθῆναι), but to serve (διακονῆσαι) and to give his life as a ransom for many" (10:45). The angels, who come to serve Jesus after the temptation, are heavenly beings sent from God for a specific mission. Moreover, Mark 10:45 stands as a bold statement of purpose for the Markan Jesus, indicating his own understanding of his service not only to the many, but to the God who has sent him. In light of this, it is indeed interesting that the only two other uses of this important word in the narrative are reserved to speak of the actions of women. Perhaps this is placing too much weight on the use of

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<sup>96</sup> Hays is right to argue that in Mark the cross is the norm of discipleship (*Moral Vision*, 84). Certainly it is symbolic of the servant community and indeed the possible suffering and persecution that may be upon Mark's audience.

<sup>97</sup> France, *Mark*, 419.

διακονέω in only two other places in the narrative.<sup>98</sup> This may beg the question of why Mark has not used it in reference to other characters in the story. This is a legitimate concern, but it still does not negate the fact that διακονέω is used in reference to the actions of heavenly beings and the Son of Man who is the one sent from God. The upshot of the use of the word in reference to women who serve Jesus is that they seem to embody the ethic of service necessary for greatness in the present activity of God. The irony is of course that males are not presented as “great” in the kingdom, and indeed Jesus reprimands male disciples who seek greatness in the kingdom on account of their incomprehension of the new ethic of service in God’s present rule (9:33-37; 10:35-45). On the other hand, as the heavenly beings are sent by God to serve, and as the Son of Man understands his own mission as a servant of God’s present rule, so the narrative implies that these women serve as examples of greatness in the kingdom.

Service as ethic in the new community under God’s present rule involves a detachment from one’s possessions, and even one’s own life. The widow who gives “all she has” is recognized as doing something of greatness, although she puts into the treasury very little (12:41-44). Moreover, the woman who anoints Jesus as an act of service, although angering some who thought the oil should be sold for money for the poor, gains praise from Jesus who sees her as giving what she has in service to him, and in some sense the proclamation of the gospel (14:3-9). Again, these two women serve as impeccable models of faithfulness to God’s present activity, by giving what they have.<sup>99</sup> Moreover, the contrast between the rich people who put in large sums from their abundance and the poor widow who puts in all she has to live on, along with the contrast between the pietistic people who complain about the waste of the oil and the woman who does what she can, further distinguishes both

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<sup>98</sup> Donahue, *Mark*, 85 mentions the various occurrences of διακονέω, but stops short of drawing conclusions concerning its use in Mark. Marla J. Selvidge (““And Those Who Followed Feared” (Mark 10:32),” *CBQ* 45 [1983]: 396-400) draws similar conclusions as I am making here. However, she brushes aside the reference to angels serving Jesus. My reading, on the other hand, sees the use of διακονέω in reference to the angels as drawing the audience to understand their divine purpose in the present activity of God.

<sup>99</sup> Donahue notes the echo of Jesus’ words spoken about the widow in 12:44 (*Mark*, 388).

women as servants in God's present rule; they are willing to part with earthly possessions in service for the kingdom.

This action of detaching oneself from possessions, although not a clear requirement of discipleship in Mark, comes with a promise of divine reward and vindication to those of whom abandonment is required.<sup>100</sup> The rich man of 10:17-22 seeks eternal life, which can only be given by the one good God, indeed is only possible because of God's action (10:27). Yet, the man's unwillingness to part with his possessions as per the demand of Jesus leaves him without hope. It is difficult for the rich to enter the kingdom because they are attached to the wealth of the world. But following this exchange between Jesus and the rich man, Peter expresses concern that he and the others have left all to follow Jesus. Jesus affirms their commitment and promises to them the eschatological reward of eternal life given only by God (10:30). The act of giving up one's possessions, as Peter claims to have done, is contextualized within the ethic of service in Mark by the inclusion of 10:31, an echoing of 8:35 and 9:35 and a transition to the definitive statement of service in God's kingdom, 10:32-45. Therefore, the members of Mark's audience are called to be free from attachment to possessions, implying the possibility of being called to abandon them for the sake of the kingdom.

The same attitude is at hand in the instruction given by Jesus in Mark 9:42-48.<sup>101</sup> Within the new covenant community of God's people, participants must abandon the self-indulgence of the world for the hope of entering God's rule. The language of Jesus is stark on the ears of Mark's audience as they are called to give up

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<sup>100</sup> Best (*Following Jesus*, 113) wrongly assumes that this is a universal requirement of all believers. Jesus' demand is only given to the rich man because he is a rich man who cannot detach himself from his wealth. Moreover, Jesus' statement to Peter in 10:29, promising eschatological reward to those who abandon all for his sake and the good news, is only a promise made to those of whom abandonment is required. The focus of Mark's narrative seems to communicate to the audience that abandonment of possessions is an extreme and likely possibility, like persecution, but not necessarily a requirement. Not all who are called to follow Jesus in the narrative are called to give up their possessions. And, more importantly, although the metaphor of discipleship in Mark seems to be following Jesus, there are characters who do not follow Jesus, but who do the will of God (ex. 5:19-20; 9:38-40), which is the true measure of discipleship. On this see Via, *Ethics of Mark's Gospel*, 134-138.

<sup>101</sup> For a helpful rhetorical analysis of this pericope see U. C. von Wahlde, "Mark 9:33-50. Discipleship: The Authority that Serves," *BZ* 29 (1985): 49-67.

self-indulgence or the members of the body that lead to self-indulgence. The renunciation of the self is central to the ethics of God's present rule. As Jesus seeks to formulate the new people of God, those who will inherit the vineyard, he seeks to bring about self-discipline of the individual before God, and within the community. Mark 9:42-48, then, presents Mark's audience not only with instruction concerning individual sin, but also sin within the new community.<sup>102</sup> The hearers of Mark may enter the kingdom of God maimed, lame, and blind, but God rewards their turning away from the hedonism of their present world.

There is one other passage that hints at a strong ethic within the new community, and specifically the intimate relationship of marriage within the community. Pharisees come to Jesus in Mark 10:2, seeking "to test him" through their questioning him about the legality of divorce. Jesus baits them with a question of his own, inquiring from them what Moses had commanded. Their response is that Moses had allowed divorce, to which Jesus answers, "Because of your hardness of heart he wrote this commandment for you." Then Jesus appeals to the creation narrative of Genesis 1:27, implying that the divine purpose of marriage as set forth by God in the creation is the standard by which marriage is to be measured. Moreover, Jesus further clarifies that humans cannot bring an end to the marriage covenant, for this would separate that which God has joined together (10:9). But there may also be something more radical here regarding the place of the female within the marital relationship, and the place of the marital relationship within the new community of God.

The Pharisees expose their own patriarchal presupposition in formulating their question with the male having the right and authority to divorce his wife by issuing a certificate of divorce. This statement allows no choice on the part of the female to defend her right or to divorce her husband. Jesus' recourse to the creation narrative, however, shows the divine intention of marriage to be between a man and

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<sup>102</sup> It is possible to see in these verses a dual meaning. On one level Jesus may be speaking here of the parts of the individual's body that must be disciplined to prevent the contamination of sin. On a metaphorical level, these instructions may be addressed to the community and the problem of individual members who have fallen into sin, and thus cutting them off would prevent the further contamination of the community. See Donahue, *Mark*, 287 and Myers, *Binding the Strong Man*, 262-264.



a woman, and the coming together of these into “one flesh.” Jesus’ answer to the Pharisees’ question seems to subvert their understanding of the right of divorce as lying solely with the male, and shows that the marital relationship is divinely ordained to be a permanent relationship of equality and oneness.

Moreover, in 10:10-12, Jesus addresses his disciples in private, perhaps a cue to the Markan audience to listen carefully. The topic is still one of marriage and divorce, but the issue has moved from the lawfulness of divorce to the consequences of divorce and remarriage. We can postulate at this point that the Markan Jesus is confining the issue of marriage within the community of faith by his use of “whoever.” “Whoever” is used in Mark to speak of those beyond the immediate hearing of Jesus’ words, but limited to those within the believing community. Thus the divorce and remarriage spoken of here is that which takes place within the community. One commits adultery against one’s previous husband or wife by marrying another. Yet, if Jesus is speaking of divorce and remarriage within the context of the present activity of God, then a man or woman who divorces and remarries not only commits adultery against his or her spouse, but also offends the former spouse of the man or woman to whom he or she is now married. The reference to the Genesis narrative, and the divine pattern for marriage becomes important at this point, for the issue is not only the coming together of the husband and wife in permanency, but also the divine imperative that no one else cause division in this relationship (10:9). Within the context of God’s present activity in the Markan narrative, the Markan discipleship community is reminded of the responsibility to God’s demand of faithfulness in marital relationships and in community relationships.

Ethics for the discipleship community of Mark derive from the oneness of God and the faithful love of the one God through following Jesus. The arrival of the dynamic rule of God envelops a dynamic ethic not bound by the former patriarchs of Israel, or determined by the current religious leadership. Rather, the ethics of God’s present rule in Mark, and in the Markan audience, derive from God’s present activity and are defined by love and the acts of love; service, forgiveness, inclusiveness, and equality in relationships.

Certainly, ethics in Mark are bound to Christology. However, since we have shown that Christology is bound to the narrative's theology, and indeed the ethics of Jesus flow from the present activity of God, the Markan audience comprehends that the ethical measure in Mark is doing the will of God.

*The Discipleship Community and Suffering as the Will of God*

Scholarly work on Mark has long recognised the prominent theme of suffering in the narrative, quite possibly implying persecution and suffering in the life of the Markan audience.<sup>103</sup> Without a doubt, Jesus' suffering is at the fore of the story, but closely connected to his suffering are the sufferings of his followers.<sup>104</sup> While those who are sick, demon possessed, unclean, and dead are considered to be suffering, the perspective of suffering with which we are concerned is suffering that is part and parcel of the will of God. Whereas alleviation of human suffering is viewed in Mark as the will of God, suffering for the sake of the mission of the gospel is also seen as the will of God.

One must be careful at this point to recognise that the suffering that will come to the disciples, and to the Markan audience, is suffering that is due to the disciple's doing of the will of God in preaching the gospel that Jesus preached, and standing against the powers against which Jesus stood.<sup>105</sup> Suffering that is willed by God in

<sup>103</sup> On this see Bas M. F. van Iersel, "The Gospel of St. Mark—Written for a Persecuted Community," *NedTT* 34 (1980): 15-36; Graham, "Passion Prediction," 18-22; Donald Senior, "'With Swords and Clubs...'—The Setting of Mark's Community and his Critique of Abusive Power," *BTB* 17 (1987): 10-20.

<sup>104</sup> For a careful reading of suffering in Mark two works stand above the rest. Dowd's *Prayer, Power, and the Problem of Suffering*, is the most thorough treatment of the subject in Mark to date. Timothy J. Gedder, offers a creative reading of suffering in Mark, one which I find many points of agreement (*Watchwords: Mark 13 in Markan Eschatology* [JSNTSup 26; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1989], esp. 149-176). However, Gedder seems to move too quickly past the issue of suffering to get at the theme of vindication. Indeed, at times Gedder trivializes the theme of suffering concluding at one point, "Clearly, for Mark, suffering and death are not tragedies, either personally, or in the cause of the kingdom. They are *stepping stones* to glory for the individual." (174; Italics added). Surely, vindication is the hope continually held out in Mark, and this thesis will deal with this theme. However, to state that suffering is but a mere "stepping stone" to glory misses the seriousness of suffering brought upon those who do the will of God.

<sup>105</sup> The Markan narrative, thus, does not answer fully the question of theodicy as it relates to human suffering except in Jesus' actions of healing. The coming of Jesus as the one who embodies the dynamic rule of God, however, is the challenge to the evil that rampages the creation. But in being a challenge to that evil, both demonic and human, Jesus himself suffers. Those who participate with

Mark is that suffering that is experienced due to one's identification with Jesus and his mission. In explaining the parable of chapter 4, Jesus states that some will fall away when persecution arises on "account of the word" (διὰ τὸν λόγον; 4:17), with "word" here signifying the gospel.<sup>106</sup> In 8:34 Jesus states that those who wish to be his disciples, must take up their cross and follow him. The use of the cross as a symbol of discipleship would certainly resonate in the ears of Mark's audience as a tool of violence and persecution, and its association with following Jesus would serve to imply the reality of suffering coming to those who identify themselves with him. Jesus' statement in 8:38 regarding followers who "are ashamed of me and my words" (ἐπαισχυνθή με καὶ τοὺς ἑμοὺς), possibly implies a situation in which the "whoever" is brought to public shame for being associated with Jesus and his message. Peter is told, after his self-acclamation of leaving all to follow Jesus, that those who leave all for Jesus and the gospel will receive return blessing, but with persecutions (διωγμῶν; 10:30).<sup>107</sup> The sons of Zebedee are informed that they will suffer a fate much like Jesus, drinking the cup he will drink, and being baptized with his baptism (10:39-40).<sup>108</sup> Moreover, Jesus predicts the persecution of his followers, who will be "handed over" (παρὰδῶσουσιν) because of their association with Jesus (ἐνεκεν ἑμοῦ), a handing over that will lead to proclaiming the gospel (13:9-13). Even in Jesus' most needy hour, his arrest, he seems to expect his disciples to go with him and endure the suffering that he will (14:42), although he knows that they will fall away (14:27-30).

This brief overview of pericopae that show the prominence of suffering and discipleship in Mark, clearly demonstrates that suffering in Mark that is willed by God is suffering brought on those who follow Jesus and participate in his mission of

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him, in challenging the evil of the world apart from God, also encounter suffering. Thus suffering willed by God, as I seek to state here, is suffering that comes as one does the will of God and is associated with God's Son and God's gospel.

<sup>106</sup> Joachim Jeremias, *The Parables of Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 1963), 77; Rudolph Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), 1:243.

<sup>107</sup> France, *Mark*, 205 sees "διωγμοί" as an integral part of the disciples' experience."

<sup>108</sup> On the metaphorical use of "cup" and "baptism" as suffering, see the discussion of this passage in chapter 3.

doing the will of God. But in what sense does theology and suffering discipleship come together in Mark? To state the question in another way, "How does the audience of Mark's narrative come to associate suffering as the will of God for them?"

The narrative structure of Jesus' suffering has been recognised by many Markan scholars as also patterning a path of suffering for the disciples. Although Jesus does not speak frankly about his death until 8:34, the reference to the bridegroom being taken away (2:20) most certainly hints at his future suffering, and the narrator's reference to the plot to kill Jesus (3:6) makes this more explicit. Moreover, from the prologue, the audience, having a historical knowledge of Jesus' death, may understand the handing over of John as foreshadowing the handing over of Jesus. John, the God-sent messenger, proclaims the baptism of repentance, and, after baptising Jesus, John is handed over (παράδοθῆναι). Immediately the audience is told of Jesus preaching of God's coming kingdom, quite possibly intending a challenge to the human government that has arrested John, but most certainly a challenge to the demonic powers ravaging the creation.

It has been noted that the preaching activity of John, and his eventual suffering leads into the preaching and suffering of Jesus. Jesus' own preaching of God's kingdom, doing the will of God, and his impending suffering patterns the anticipated life of those who follow him, including, of course, the Markan audience.<sup>109</sup> The importance of this is that as John was the divinely sent messenger, so Jesus has been sent from God to proclaim the coming kingdom. Thus, the God who has sent them determines both John's and Jesus' fates. If the pattern holds true for disciples, then, it is possible to see God's divine hand behind the mission and eventual suffering of the disciples.<sup>110</sup> Thus, if the evidence from Mark shows this,

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<sup>109</sup> Geddert states, "[Mark] highlights the fact that *through the very fate of John the Baptist, Jesus' ministry receives the signal to go ahead*" (*Watchwords*, 155, italics original).

<sup>110</sup> See D. C. Duling & N. Perrin, *The New Testament: Proclamation and Parenesis, Myth and History* (Orlando, FL: Harcourt Brace, 1994), 322-323, who see the presentation of Jesus and the future community in Mark linked by a common purpose (preaching) and a common fate (being delivered up).

then suffering as a disciple means, in Mark, that suffering is part of the will of God.<sup>111</sup>

There is something interesting in the way Mark reports John's execution that has implications for understanding this pattern.<sup>112</sup> The audience is informed very early in the narrative of John's arrest (1:14), but nothing more is said about this until 6:14-29. What is peculiar about the narrative of 6:14-29, where the audience is informed about John's execution, is that (1) there are many similarities between the account of John's suffering and Jesus' passion<sup>113</sup>, and (2) 6:14-29 is sandwiched between the sending out of the disciples by Jesus (6:7-13) and their return from their ministry (6:30). Intercalations are well known in Mark to be literary structures intended to draw the audience to understand one story, of which two parts are placed around the whole of another story, by what is communicated through the middle story.<sup>114</sup> Here we find in Mark an intercalation in which the twelve are called and sent out in 6:7-13, the audience is informed about the arrest and death of John in 6:14-29, and then they learn of the return of those who were sent out (6:30). Tying the two ends of the intercalation together is the verb ἀποστέλλειν in 6:7 and the noun οἱ ἀπόστολοι in 6:30.<sup>115</sup> The audience would certainly remember at this point, especially in light of the narrative of John's death, that John was first introduced in the narrative as the messenger whom God is sending (ἀποστέλλω; 1:2). Now the disciples are the ones being referred to as the ones who are sent, only

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<sup>111</sup> This does not necessarily require that members of the Markan audience would undergo persecution as a sure sign of discipleship, but only holds out the possibility that first century followers of Jesus, who do the will of God, as Jesus did the will of God, were likely to encounter opposition as Jesus encountered opposition.

Donahue ("Neglected Factor," 587) views suffering as an aspect of discipleship, but not defining discipleship in Mark. I am in agreement with Donahue, and dependent on his suggestion that discipleship is doing the will of God. However, I see in Mark suffering as not just an aspect of discipleship, but also an extremely likely component of discipleship.

<sup>112</sup> For a brief summary of how this has been understood see Gedert, *Watchwords*, 295n24.

<sup>113</sup> On the various parallels between John and Jesus' deaths in Mark see Guelich, *Mark*, 328.

<sup>114</sup> On intercalations in Mark see James R. Edwards, "Markan Sandwiches: The Significance of Interpolation in Markan Narratives," *NovT* 31 (1989): 193-216.

<sup>115</sup> As Guelich, *Mark*, 338 notes, it is not necessary to understand οἱ ἀπόστολοι in the technical sense of "Apostles," but rather in the sense of those who are sent out.

they are sent by Jesus, who will identify himself soon as the one sent from God (9:37), and who has implied his divine coming on other occasions.<sup>116</sup> The Markan audience, identifying themselves with the disciples in Mark, would understand the intercalation of these two stories in 6:7-30 as an implicit warning to those who choose to do the will of God. As John was divinely sent and suffered, so Jesus has been sent and will suffer, meaning that those who follow the divine will in preaching the gospel of God will likewise suffer.<sup>117</sup> In a real sense the preaching mission that the disciples carry out is an extension of Jesus' own mission, which is opened by John's preparing of the way. Thus, what starts with the divine sending of John carries through to the divine sending of Jesus and the disciples. Included in this mission, however, is the likelihood of suffering as a result of doing the will of God.

At the heart of Mark's narrative is the movement of Jesus and the disciples. The prologue communicates to the audience that Jesus will go "the way of the Lord." As we argued earlier, the "way of the Lord" is a reference to God's entrance into the Markan narrative, a way in which God is bringing in the kingdom of God in victory.<sup>118</sup> At the same time, however, it is the way of God that Jesus will follow to the cross. This way in Mark is also viewed as a metaphor of discipleship of suffering, which Jesus and his disciples follow, headed for Jerusalem (10:32), where the Son of Man will be handed over (παράδιδωμι) for death.<sup>119</sup> Mark's audience

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<sup>116</sup> See the discussion on Jesus as the one sent from God in the previous chapter.

<sup>117</sup> See Graham, "Passion Prediction," 19; Donald Senior, *The Passion of Jesus in the Gospel of Mark* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 1984), 19. Although Geddert (*Watchwords*, 157) offers a comprehensive reading of the progression from John to Jesus to the disciples, his understanding of the story of John's death sandwiched between the going and coming of the disciples is that it was intended to show that though John has been executed, "twelve messengers [are] taking his place." Certainly this is a fair and attractive reading. But Geddert dismisses too quickly the reading I am suggesting. While indeed twelve messengers take the place of the one, the threat against John, that becomes real, is now a threat to the twelve, and by consequence, the Markan audience. The sandwich structure of 6:7-30 brings this potential threat to the attention of the audience.

<sup>118</sup> See also Marcus, *The Way of the Lord*, 29 and Rikki E. Watts, *Isaiah's New Exodus and Mark* (WUNT 88; Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr (Paul Siebeck), 1997), 130.

<sup>119</sup> For the view that ὁ ὁδός in Mark is a metaphor for suffering discipleship see William M. Swartley ("The Structural Function of the Tern "Way" in Mark's Gospel," in *The New Way of Jesus: Essays Presented to Howard Charles* [ed. W. Klassen; Newton, KS: Faith and Life Press, 1980], 77), who cites the following as supporting this view: Ulrich Luz, "Das Geheimnis und die Markinische Christologie," 24-25; Eduard Schweizer, *The Good News According to Mark* (trans. D. H. Madvig;



“would easily read themselves into this portrait of the disciples on their way up to Jerusalem,”<sup>120</sup> and understand that as the disciples are called to walk the way to suffering, so they are called to participate in doing the will of God even at the cost of walking the way. Although the disciples fail to participate with Jesus in his suffering in Jerusalem, they will not escape this suffering, as Jesus offers a prediction of their own fate in 13:9-12.

I argued at length in the discussion of Mark's Christology that the narrative clearly presents Jesus' movement toward death as that which is willed by God. But does there exist a connection in Mark between the divine hand in Jesus' death and the suffering fate of disciples? This can be answered by noticing three things concerning Mark's narrative. First, as already has been suggested, the “way” section in Mark highlights Jesus' movement toward Jerusalem and the call of his disciples to follow him. Faithful disciples are called to follow Jesus all the way to Jerusalem, and to be *with him* during his sufferings. Those who fail to do such, fail to align themselves with the gospel Jesus preaches. These are those who fall away when persecutions come (4:17), for they fail to fulfil their mission of being with Jesus. The disciples are portrayed in this way not because the author has some sort of vendetta against them, but because, as characters, they serve the narrative purpose of showing how hard the life of faithfulness is, the reality of human failure, and more importantly, that divine strength is needed to do the will of God.

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London: SPCK, 1971), 216, 221-222, 385; Norman Perrin, “The Literary *Gattung*, Gospel.....Some Observations,” *ET* 82 (1970): 4-7; and Ernest Best, “Discipleship in Mark: Mark viii.22-x.52,” *SJT* 23 (1970): 323-337. See Swartley's article for a good summary of the various views of how ὁ ὁδός is understood in Mark. For the view that there exists no theological metaphor through the use of ὁ ὁδός in Mark see Gundry, *Mark*, 440-442, 597, 1047. For a critique of Gundry's view see Watts, *New Exodus*, 128-132. Marcus (*Way of the Lord*, 33) argues that “the way” in Mark is God's “βασιλεία, his own extension of his kingly power”, whereas Swartley (79-82) makes a case for understanding “the way” in Mark as the way the disciple must go to enter into the kingdom of God. I see no justification for siding with either view. Both have recognised the connection between ὁ ὁδός and the kingdom of God, as well as the connection between ὁ ὁδός and discipleship, although Marcus (31-32) sees this aspect as secondary. Yet, can one really make a clear distinction between “the way” as God's coming in kingly power and the disciples' way to the kingdom? Both seem to be present in Mark. I concur with Geddert (*Watchwords*, 151) that “the way” in Mark is not the way *to*, but the way *of* discipleship.

<sup>120</sup> Marcus, *Way of the Lord*, 37.

Second, in Jesus' explicit predictions concerning his death, which all occur in the context of "the way" section in Mark, he uses the self-designation Son of Man. As noted above, this title can be viewed in Mark as the title that designates Jesus as the human being who stands before God, and as the human being who is representative for humanity. God's handing over of the "human one" for suffering, and the Son of Man's going the way of suffering "as it is written of him" (9:12), suggests that the paradigmatic human who does the will of God, and thus faces suffering as the divine will, serves as the one who sets the way for those who follow, a way that has the strong potential for ending in persecution.

Third, Jesus offers to his disciples a prediction of their own fate in Mark 13:9-13. Mark 13:9-13 stands as the centre of the first half of Mark 13, a chapter that details future events and stands as the last private instruction to the disciples.<sup>121</sup> Moreover, 13:9-13 has been recognised as implying a situation of persecution in the Markan community.<sup>122</sup> What is interesting to note here is the use of παραδίδωμι by Jesus to speak of the fate of the disciples (13:9).<sup>123</sup> Mark's Jesus' use of this word is intentional and meant as another way of coalescing the fate of Jesus and his followers. The employment of παραδίδωμι would remind the audience of Jesus' own "handing over" as part of God's will, and thus any suffering that comes upon them as a result of their doing the will of God is part of God's will for them. Given the reasonable argument that the hearers of Mark's narrative would identify themselves with the disciples, failures and successes, it also seems reasonable that they would see their fate as the same fate of the disciples as foretold by Jesus.

But this raises a crucial question for the Markan audience. If they are to understand suffering as the will of God which comes as a result of doing the will of

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<sup>121</sup> Pesch, *Das Markusevangelium*, 2:282.

<sup>122</sup> Weeden, *Traditions in Conflict*, 82; Graham, "Passion Prediction."

<sup>123</sup> Graham, "Passion Prediction," 18-19. One might argue that the use of παραδίδωμι in the third person plural negates the idea that God is behind the "handing over" of the disciples. This, however, seems to miss the point that Mark is both correlating the death of Jesus and the possible suffering of the disciples, and drawing a distinction between their sufferings. Jesus, as the Son of Man, is the one who will go to the cross, and thus map the way of the Lord. Disciples follow his fate, and thus follow the will of God.

God, does the narrator implicitly or explicitly communicate to the audience that disciples must acquiescently accept the suffering that comes as a result of doing God's will? The answer seems to be yes, again, due to the presentation of Jesus as the model of discipleship, who accepts his suffering and his humiliation at the hand of his oppressors as the will of God. But this need not mean that the narrative communicates to its audience a fatalistic view of discipleship, whose end is suffering without recourse. Mark's story of discipleship within the presentation of God in the narrative holds out the possibility of *divine* release from suffering and assurance of *divine* strengthening in the face of suffering.

In one of the most thorough treatments of suffering in Mark to date, Sharyn Dowd offers the thesis that suffering is the will of God for Jesus, and maybe the will of God for the followers of Jesus, including Mark's audience, but there always exists the tension between the reality of suffering and the God who has the power to stop this suffering.<sup>124</sup> The solution to this tension, according to Dowd, is the prayer of Jesus in the garden (14:32-42). Dowd offers an insightful analysis of prayer in Mark, its relationship to suffering, and particularly how the prayer in the garden serves to answer the paradox of suffering in the minds of the Markan audience. She has rightfully suggested that the prayer scene in the garden, although presenting Jesus alone in his anguish, forces the audience to participate with Jesus in the prayer for God's deliverance.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, however, the audience also infers that because God does not take the cup of suffering from Jesus, then Jesus' own suffering is the will of God, which Jesus wilfully accepts.<sup>126</sup> As Dowd states, "The scene is terrible, not because Jesus must suffer, but because his suffering is the will of the God who is powerful enough to prevent it, and who has eliminated so much suffering in the narrative prior to this scene."<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> Dowd, *Prayer*.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*, 155. See also Borrell, who remarks, "[I]n 14:32-42, only the reader actually assists at the prayer of Jesus" (*Good News of Peter's Denial*, 181)

<sup>126</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

Indeed, as I have already stated, in agreement with Dowd, the suffering of Jesus is part and parcel of his steadfastness to do the will of God, even here to the point of drinking the cup of suffering. Suffering that is the will of God, then, is not any suffering, but solely suffering that a believer incurs because of his or her faith in God and God's Son and because that believer does the will of God.<sup>128</sup> The lessening of human suffering caused by the demonic or disease is the will of God in Mark, but this, Mark communicates to his audience, may not be true for suffering that comes as a result of one's allegiance to God's mission. Dowd, however, is right to argue that the prayer of Jesus in the garden does hold out the possibility of release from this suffering.<sup>129</sup> The first part of the prayer highlights the Markan Jesus' faith that God is both powerful enough and can choose to free him from suffering.<sup>130</sup>

Given the fact that the audience of Mark is called to participate with Jesus in his prayer, their own prayer for God's deliverance from persecution on account of the gospel of God is important. Through the example of Jesus' prayer the audience is called to offer to God their own prayers for comfort, with the resolve to do the will of God, whatever that may be. Thus, as Dowd confirms, the prayer of Jesus is the audience's own prayer for liberation. As Jesus calls out to his *Abba*/Father, entrusting himself to the loving relationship and care of God, so also the audience, who derive their relationship to God as their *Abba*/Father through their participation with Jesus, are presented with the model prayer one prays in the face of persecution. The prayer holds out the possibility of divine intervention if the all-powerful God of Jesus chooses so.

But equally clear from Jesus' prayer is the resolve to do the will of God. The listening audience is drawn into pray the prayer of petition but cannot escape also praying the prayer of resolution. If they do, then they fail like those in the narrative who are called to keep awake. The audience, then, must find hope not only in Jesus' prayer for divine relief, but also in Jesus' commitment to the will of God, to drink the

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<sup>128</sup> Ibid., 134. This does not preclude later Christian communities from utilizing Jesus' garden prayer as a model prayer for times of suffering in whatever situation or circumstances.

<sup>129</sup> Ibid., 157.

<sup>130</sup> On the four-part structure of the prayer, see Dowd, 155-156.

cup of suffering. The question is how? Where does the Markan audience find strength and endurance to face persecution and suffering without failing? The answer lies close at hand in the garden pericope.

Again, the presentation of Jesus' actions versus those of his disciples in this scene highlight Jesus as the model of true discipleship, and the disciples as failures who are representative of human weakness. While it is certainly true that Jesus is presented in very human terms as he himself struggles to do the will of God, his demeanour in this scene is remarkable to say the least. The disciples, on the other hand, sleep and fail to be with Jesus in his hour of great need. The scene draws the audience to determine who is the one who exhibits true faithfulness in doing the will of God. The clear answer is Jesus, and thus, the query remains: If Jesus struggles himself to do the will of God at this point, and assuredly the prayer in the garden implies this, how does he come to the point of actually accepting God's will? What is different between Jesus and his followers? The answer may lie in Jesus' words in 14:38 concerning the spirit and the flesh.

It is quite easy to assume, as many commentators do, that τὸ πνεῦμα in 14:38 refers to the human spirit.<sup>131</sup> Those who see the words of Jesus in this way, understand him referring to the "inner self,"<sup>132</sup> that part of the human that "is noble and godly,"<sup>133</sup> "through which people can be moved to do what is harmonious with God's plan."<sup>134</sup> This reading seems to be so straightforward that even the layperson and scholar have traditionally understood Jesus as referring to the inner spirit of the human. It seems to be a case of accepting τὸ πνεῦμα as a reference to the human spirit as a closed case. All the evidence, however, has not been taken into

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<sup>131</sup> Commentators are divided on this. Those choosing to read τὸ πνεῦμα in 14:38 as indicating the human spirit include: Raymond E. Brown, *The Death of the Messiah* (New York: Doubleday, 1994), 2:198-200; Evans, *Mark*, 415; France, *Mark*, 587; Hooker, *Mark*, 349; and Donahue, *Mark*, 409. Those arguing that the reference means God's Spirit consist of: Schweizer, *Mark*, 313-314; Taylor, *Mark*, 555; Lane, *Mark*, 520; and Witherington, *Mark*, 380. Cranfield (*Mark*, 434) mentions both options, but stops short of drawing a conclusion. As my readers will discover, I am arguing for understanding the reference as pointing to God's Spirit. I am dependant on the commentators who take this point of view, but I am also proposing some additional arguments in support of this reading.

<sup>132</sup> France, *Mark*, 587.

<sup>133</sup> Donahue, *Mark*, 409.

<sup>134</sup> Brown, *Death of the Messiah*, 199.

consideration. Thus, following some of the arguments of those who understand τὸ πνεῦμα as referring to the Spirit of God, I will offer my own additional arguments.

It is perplexing that many of those who read “spirit” as human spirit ignore Mark’s use of the term in the Gospel. Πνεῦμα occurs 23 times in Mark, with 14 of these referring to “unclean spirit(s).”<sup>135</sup> We may conjecture already at this point that with the dominant number of references pointing toward “spirits” that are not human, that Mark does reserve this term for beings from beyond the earthly realm. More evidence will only verify this further. Of the 9 remaining uses of τὸ πνεῦμα in Mark, 4 are qualified by ἅγιος, indicating “Holy Spirit,” a clear reference to the Spirit of God.<sup>136</sup> Two are used when Jesus shows exasperation with his opponents and he “perceives in his spirit” their thoughts (2:8) or sighs deeply in his spirit when they ask for a sign (8:12). The remaining three are the only uses, outside of the two in chapter 9 which clearly indicate an unclean spirit, that have the definite article τὸ in reference to πνεῦμα, without another qualifying word. Two of these are in the context of the baptism and temptation scenes and refer most assuredly to the Spirit of God that comes upon Jesus and “casts” him into the wilderness to face temptation. The other reference employing the definite article is in 14:38. While this evidence is not conclusive on its own, it does help open other avenues of verification that can support our argument.

The question must be asked: In the two references to Jesus’ own spirit in 2:8 and 8:12, is it possible, within the framework of Mark’s story, in which Jesus is presented as the Spirit empowered one, that Jesus’ human spirit is the referent? I think not. The Spirit that comes upon Jesus at the baptism, throws him into the wilderness to face temptations, and empowers him to work miracles never leaves Jesus.

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<sup>135</sup> 1:23, 26, 27; 3:11, 30; 5:2, 8, 13; 6:7; 7:25; 9:25. The other 3 references to an unclean spirit (9:17, 20, 25) leave out ἀκάθαρτος, but the context clearly implies the presence of an unclean spirit.

<sup>136</sup> 1:8; 3:29; 12:36; 13:11.



Moreover, the reference in 14:38 is between “flesh” and “spirit” and fits within the dichotomous theme of human versus divine in Mark, particularly beginning in 8:33. The disciples fail in preparing for the trials ahead because they rely on human understanding and strength. Jesus, however, exhibits divine understanding and strength that comes from God’s Spirit.

The coming of the Spirit onto Jesus, of course, is narrated in the baptism scene. This is the beginning of Jesus’ narrative life. Here, the relationship between Jesus and God is voiced and established by God who calls Jesus “my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (1:11). This relationship, however, is remembered by Jesus in the garden as he calls out “Αββα, ὁ πατήρ.” Jesus is certainly addressing God in prayer, but in doing so he is calling on God to remember the relationship as he asks to be released from the suffering. Moreover, his resolve to do the will of God, despite the impending agony of death, reflects his own pleasure with the father’s will. For these scenes to reflect one another, including a reference to the Spirit, would seem to suggest that the Spirit that comes on Jesus in the baptism, is the same Spirit of which he speaks in the 14:38. Again, is it possible in Mark’s narrative scheme, for Jesus to be thinking of any other Spirit other than the Spirit of God?

Moreover, Jesus is certainly facing temptation in this scene, and the presence of the Spirit, as in the temptation of 1:12-13, certifies that the spirit of which Jesus speaks, is the Spirit of God that empowers him to accept God’s will. The disciples sleep because their flesh is weak. Jesus calls on them, however, to follow him by relying on the Spirit who is “willing” to give divine strength to face God’s will in suffering. The disciples will fail the test because they fail to depend on the Spirit of God, something Jesus had once told them they must do (13:11). Jesus succeeds in doing God’s will because, instead of sleeping, he seeks God’s divine strength by God’s Spirit through the communion of prayer.

Additionally, if the baptism scene can be linked to the garden scene, which has now been shown to be the case, then the narrative structure of Mark again becomes crucial for the Markan audience. Having identified their own baptism as a Spirit-filling experience (note the arguments earlier in this chapter), and having identified their own struggles and temptations as part and parcel of the life of

following and participating with Jesus in doing God's will, those in Mark's audience would also associate their own persecutions as reflecting those of Jesus, and thus associate Jesus' reliance on the Spirit as their own (cf. 13:11). As Jesus' baptism before God is their own, as Jesus' struggles are their own, and as Jesus' suffering is their own, so also the Spirit that empowers and strengthens Jesus and the God from whom Jesus seeks strength is their own God, and is eager to give them strength. Thus, from the Markan audience's perspective, if the *πνεῦμα* of 14:38 is merely the "inner human spirit," then there seems no hope for them to follow and participate with Jesus.<sup>137</sup> If the "willing spirit" is only the inner self that is bent toward godly actions, then any chance of a transcendent and numinous empowerment to face persecutions is impossible. The audience is only left to trust in their own human power. But if the *πνεῦμα* is a reference to God's Spirit, then the hope of enduring the persecution is at hand.

Thus, again, Jesus is viewed here more as a paradigm or model of discipleship and faithfulness before God, and the audience that identifies with his own struggle to do the will of God, is also called to identify with Jesus' reliance on God in prayer. The disciples, on the other hand, are models of unfaithfulness at this point, not for their ignorance, but more so for their failure to stay awake and pray. The audience would recognize the narrated contrasts in this scene, and would realise that the bridge between failure and faithfulness is Spirit empowerment. Jesus is starkly presented as struggling with what is to come.<sup>138</sup> Yet the resolution between his fear of pain and death and his desire to do the will of God is brought about by the Spirit.

Hope for endurance in the face of God-willed suffering, therefore, is not in the Markan audience's human resolution to do the will of God, but in their

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<sup>137</sup> I have not mentioned the evidence from the LXX that those who support the view I have taken utilize in their arguments. Including these as part of my main arguments does not seem necessary. It does seem, however, that the saying of Jesus in 14:38 does echo particular understanding from the Old Testament regarding the dichotomy between the flesh and spirit. See for example Ps 50:10-12 (LXX); Isa 31:3.

<sup>138</sup> Garrett (*The Temptations of Jesus*, 96) rightly, I think, views Jesus as "double-minded" at this point in the narrative.

dependence on the Spirit of God who gives them strength to face persecution. This Spirit-power is given by God through prayer. Perhaps Jesus' praying three times indicates to the audience the necessity of continual prayer in the face of persecution. The admonition to "watch" (γρηγορέω) signifies the urgency with which Mark's audience should live their lives in obedience, and hints at an ever-present stance toward what is to come. Prayer and Spirit empowerment cannot be a one-off event in the headwind of persecution. Hope of any endurance must be found in continually watching and praying for God's strength, modelling the Markan Jesus' own practice.

Suffering in Mark that is willed by God is that suffering that comes to those who seek to do God's will, those seeking to align themselves with Jesus and the gospel he preaches. The hearers of Mark's Gospel are not to turn away from this suffering, but to call on God, who is powerful enough to bring release, but who may choose to allow them to continue. But these believers are not left alone to endure suffering, for Jesus models prayer for them as the means by which they can find strength given through their dependence on the Spirit who is willing to empower.

But Mark's narrative is not fully a tragedy, for suffering and death are *not* the end of the story. The audience of Mark is not left with a fatalistic narrative of despair and tragedy, but with the hope of vindication by the God of Jesus and of Mark's story.

*The Discipleship Community and God's Eschatological Salvation, Vindication, and Reward*

The theme of vindication in Mark is often overlooked because of the prominence of suffering in the narrative. Yet, this Gospel does not end in the tragic death of an ill-fated troublemaker. Rather, this story ends, and continues in the life of the narrative audience, with vindication. The protagonist of Mark's story, Jesus, however, does not bring about vindication, but more accurately, vindication is accomplished by the one with whom the narrative began, and whose actions continue past Mark's Gospel, God. Thus, any discussion of discipleship, as it relates to

Christology, and ultimately theology, must take into consideration the theme of divine vindication of those who do the will of God.

The starting point with such a discussion must also begin with the presentation of Jesus' view of his own vindication as that which God will accomplish. This is tied to his understanding of his own suffering, and serves not to soften the harshness of the impending suffering, or to excuse suffering in any way, but to direct the audience to *God's* triumphant victory over evil and death. The "way of the Lord" that Jesus is sent to walk leads to Jerusalem and the cross, but also must continue on in God's vindication of the faithful Son. The way of the Lord, then, is both the way of Jesus to suffering and death, and the way of God's victory over suffering and death in the resurrection.

In our previous discussion of Christology, we presented the narrative evidence laid out in Mark's story, evidence that presents God as the vindicator of the faithful Son. It is not necessary to restate all that was detailed in that earlier discussion. Rather, in continuing along the same line of argument we have been presenting in this chapter, Jesus' vindication by God is a precursor to the vindication by God of those who do the will of God. As those who are called to follow Jesus, those who are called to do the will of God, participate with Jesus in his proclamation of the Gospel, in his living under the dynamic and present rule of God, and in his suffering for the sake of the gospel, so too these are called to hope, as Jesus does, and participate with Jesus, in resurrection, vindication, and exaltation made possible by God.

Noticeably, then, Mark's narrative is not primarily a narrative of suffering, but looks past the suffering of Jesus to the resurrection, exaltation, and vindication of Jesus. The same can be said regarding those who are called to participate with and follow Jesus in doing the will of God. As they suffer because they do the will of God, God will also vindicate them. Jesus makes this clear in 8:34-38. Those who loose their life for the cause of the gospel of God, and who identify with Jesus, will save their lives. Salvation at this point must be viewed as the eschatological salvation given only by God. In fact, salvation is only possible through God's action (10:24-27).

Moreover, although the saying of Jesus in 8:38 is presented in the negative, the reverse can be deduced. The Son of Man will be ashamed, in the glory of his father, of those who are ashamed of him in this generation. At the same time, those who are not ashamed in this generation, of them the Son of Man will not be ashamed. This may imply their participation with Jesus, "when he comes in the glory of his father."

In response to Peter's words about leaving everything (10:28-30), Jesus promises rewards, including eternal life. God alone gives eternal life, and here, particularly to those who have left everything and followed Jesus. Moreover, God alone is the one who prepares the seats on the right and left of Jesus (10:40), and the one who alone gives salvation to those who endure (13:13).

The ending of Mark presents, however, a great deal of hope to the Markan audience regarding their own vindication by God. The women who go to the tomb to look for the one who has been crucified (ἐσταυρωμένον), find only a "young man" who proclaims that Jesus has been raised (ἡγέρθη). While most have concentrated on the problem of the women's silence when they leave the tomb, or on the problem of Jesus' non-appearance, the narrative seems to place the focus on the action of *God*. The divine messenger who proclaims that Jesus has been raised proclaims the good news of God's triumph in the face of human power and violence. The contrary actions upon Jesus mentioned in the narrative, crucifixion and resurrection, highlight once again the human-divine opposition of the narrative. This Jesus who has been crucified, has now been raised. The actions of God overcome the actions of evil humanity.

This story may resonate in the hearing of the discipleship community of Mark as the promise of divine salvation and vindication in the face of human power and violence. The promises of salvation and vindication for both Jesus and those who participate with him are narrated throughout Mark, and it is only in the pericope of the resurrection that these promises find hope through the action of God in raising Jesus. In hearing the young man in the tomb proclaim this resurrection, the Markan audience also finds hope in the actions of God. Their possible suffering as a result of

doing the will of God is trumped by the narration of God's actions in raising Jesus, and their hope that *his* resurrection is their own.

Furthermore, God's actions in raising Jesus, and the young man's message to the women to go and tell Peter and the others, hint to the audience that the faithfulness of God is not dependent on the faithfulness of humanity. The direct reference to Peter reminds the audience of Peter's failure, but also overcomes that failure via the divine action and promise.<sup>139</sup> This communicates not only the triumph of God over evil carried out by the enemies of the Son of God, but also over the failures of his followers and co-workers in the kingdom, and it gives hope to the Markan audience that despite failure, divine faithfulness and power offer hope.<sup>140</sup>

### Summary and Conclusions

This chapter has sought to delineate the Markan view of discipleship as an aspect of the Markan presentation of God, not separate from, but in conjunction with, the Markan presentation of Jesus. Undeniably, the narrative of Mark inextricably connects discipleship and Christology. As we have seen, nevertheless, the presentation of Jesus is as the faithful one who models doing the will of God, who goes the way of God, including the way of suffering willed by God, and who hopes in and experiences the vindication of God. Thus, while the discipleship community is called to follow Jesus, they are also called to participate with him in doing the will of God. Chiefly, then, the discipleship community is in relationship to the God of Jesus via their relationship to the crucified and risen Jesus, expressing faith in the present activity of God, proclaiming the gospel of God, living under the new ethic of God's dynamic rule, facing suffering as part of the will of God, and hoping in God for their own salvation and vindication.

The presentation of the twelve in Mark serves the theme of discipleship only in a cursory manner. The presentation of the successes and failures of the disciples in Mark is for the purpose of presenting human reality before God, and to show Jesus as the exemplary Human One, who is the faithful disciple. The theme of

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<sup>139</sup> Borrell, *The Good News of Peter's Denial*, 167.

<sup>140</sup> Hanson, *The Endangered Promises*, 245-246.



discipleship, however, has more to do with the audience of Mark's narrative, for they participate in the narrative in its hearing. Thus, the discipleship community of Mark can hope in the God of Jesus, who was faithful to Jesus, and will indeed be faithful to all who imitate and participate with Jesus in doing the will of God. From this aspect, then, discipleship in Mark is better defined in terms of the discipleship community before God. Jesus serves as the model of faithfulness of God whom the disciples follow and with whom they participate. Thus, although discipleship is an aspect of Mark's Christology, it is also reasonable to view discipleship in Mark as an aspect of Mark's *theo*-logy, for disciples hope not in the power of Jesus to raise them from the dead and give them salvation, but in the God who raised Jesus, and through whom all things are possible (10:27).

## **Chapter Six**

### **The Theology of the Gospel of Mark**

In this thesis I have attempted to address the neglected factor of New Testament theology by investigating the presentation of God in the second Gospel. I have chosen to do so through a close reading of the text of Mark, giving careful attention to the narrative presentation of God. I have not attempted to peer behind the text of Mark to look for traditions about God, or how a redactor of the narrative may have structured the narrative using sources. My concern has been first and foremost with the story Mark narrates, and how a first century listening audience would understand this story.

This way of approaching the text has been supported by the reading strategies of literary scholars such as Wolfgang Iser, and critics of Mark's Gospel such as Robert Fowler. The chosen methodology has also been influenced by the work of Mary Ann Beavis who has argued for understanding Mark from a first century authorial audience's perspective, an audience located within the Graeco-Roman social and religious milieu. Moreover, I have utilised the work of modern literary critics such as Wayne Booth and Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan to analyse how characters are presented in narratives with the purpose of drawing out where God is presented either implicitly or explicitly in the Gospel of Mark.

This eclectic approach to the text of Mark has been with the intention of hearing the Gospel as a temporal event in which the narrator communicates the reality and presence of God in and through the narrative. In chapters 2-3 we took painstaking care to read the Gospel with a focus on how the text of Mark presents God as the narrative progresses from its beginning to its end. From this analysis, we moved to re-examine the presentation of Jesus in Mark in light of the presentation of God; to understand the Christology of Mark in light of its theology. Moreover, we also sought to gain a new understanding of discipleship in Mark as an aspect of the presentation of God.

In this summary chapter, I am seeking to review the findings of this investigation by restating more concisely and systematically how God is presented in Mark by proposing, in summary form, how the authorial audience of Mark may have

been affected by this presentation. Moreover, I will offer in this concluding chapter a brief assessment of the contribution of this thesis.

### **The God of Mark's Gospel**

This thesis has sought to bring forth the otherwise neglected factor in the study of Mark, the presentation of God. What follows are succinct conclusions that can be surmised from this reading. These conclusions are certainly not exclusive, for other readings of Mark might extract multifaceted understandings of the God of Mark. This is the essence of reading and re-reading Mark's story. But these conclusions are proposed as a vehicle for further opening the discussion of the God of Mark's Gospel.

#### *Mark's God is the God of the Living*

Mark's God is not bound by the narrative. This may be a very straightforward statement with little need of justification. However, the implications of this statement are great for the listening audience of Mark's narrative. The narrative may open with the "beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ," but the immediate utilisation of that which is *γέγραπται* sets the story now being narrated in the history of God's dealing with Israel. What God has begun in the past, God is now accomplishing in the present coming of Jesus, the Son of God, and to a great extent, in the life and ministry of the Markan audience. The *ἀρχὴ* of the gospel is only the beginning of God's new revelation in Jesus, and will extend to and beyond the experience of the listening audience.

Following others such as Marcus and Watts, we have argued that Mark follows a New Exodus pattern, and thus the story's incorporation of Israel's story with the story of Jesus communicates to the Markan audience that the God of the narrative is the God who has had a history with Israel. Mark's narrative, and the character of Jesus in it, affirms this in many and various ways, but particularly in Jesus' recitation of the *Shema* in 12:29, in the reference to God as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (12:26), and in the allusion to God as Creator (10:6). The covenant God of Israel is the God of Mark, and the narrative does not bind this God.

The frustrating ending of Mark may also be seen as communicating the boundless nature of the Markan God. The promise that Jesus will meet the disciples in Galilee is left unresolved and unfulfilled, leaving some readers to propose that Mark either does not end at 16:8, or that the women fail to report what was told them by the young man at the tomb. However, the ending of Mark may not be an ending at all, but rather a new beginning opening up the future for God's presence and activity with the new covenant community.<sup>1</sup> The very fact that the narrative is being proclaimed in the hearing of the audience demonstrates, first that the good news was not left at the empty tomb, but that it had reached the audience of Mark, and second that the God of Israel's past, and of the Jesus of Mark's narrative, is the living God of their present and future. The resurrection and exaltation of Jesus spoken of in the story is an act of God that is precursor to the resurrection and exaltation of the faithful followers of Jesus who do the will of God. The future of God is opened in the present hearing of the narrative by the Markan audience and thus the God communicated through the narrative is not bound by the narrative. The God of Mark's narrative is the Creator (10:6), who is the living God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (12:26-27), the one God of Israel, and the  $\alpha\beta\beta\alpha$ ,  $\pi\alpha\tau\acute{\eta}\rho$  of Jesus and those who follow him.

*Mark's God is Primarily Experienced and Known Through Jesus*

Commentators have often remarked that nothing in the story happens without Jesus, and this must be said of God as well. Indeed, although the story is introduced as "the beginning of the gospel of Jesus Christ, the Son of God," the main character, Jesus, acts out of his understanding of the mission for which God has sent him. The life of the Markan Jesus, therefore, is empowered by God through the coming of the Spirit, and directed by God through the communion of the Son with the Father. In one of the most illustrative scenes of this communion, Jesus prays in the garden, accepting the will of God. But Jesus does not do the will of God out of a reluctant obedience to a distant and sadistic God. Rather, the doing of God's will by Jesus has

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<sup>1</sup> Note Andrew T. Lincoln's arguments in his "The Promise and Failure: Mark 16:7,8," *JBL* 108 (1989): 283-300.

its impetus in the communal relationship between the Father and the Son. The divine will, though expressed in terms of that which “must” take place, does not suggest an impersonal force that drives Jesus to the cross. Rather, the obedience of the Son to the will of the Father is motivated by the trust and faith the Son has in the Father, and a desire to fulfil the mission for which the Son of Man/God has come. In this sense, the theology of Mark’s narrative is not a set of ideas or propositions, but a dynamic relationship between the God of Israel and God’s Beloved Son.

As the Son who is sent by God, Jesus acts as representative for God, and as such, is the one whom people are called to follow as part of being faithful to the gospel of God. His presence in the narrative embodies the presence of God on earth. His actions in the narrative are representative of God’s actions. His teachings are by the authority of God and represent what is the will of God. The Markan Jesus takes on the prerogatives of God in action and in speech. In the hearing of the Gospel narrative, then, a Markan audience experiences the authoritative presence of the divine through the narrative presence of Jesus, the Son of God. What Paul Meyer has stated concerning the experience of God through the presentation of Jesus in John can also be true for Mark:

“God is known and God’s presence felt only because the Son alone “presents” God to the world, is wholly transparent to God, and is the only reliable vehicle for God’s presence and action in the world.”<sup>2</sup>

However, Jesus does not take on the fullness of God’s prerogatives, leaving the designation of being “good” reserved solely for God (10:17-18), and admitting his own ignorance as to the “time when these things will take place,” leaving the future in the providence of God (13:32). Moreover, Jesus only draws attention to himself in light of his experience of God, and he never works at cross-purposes with God, but rather directs attention to God.

Yet it is the Son who calls God “your Father” indicating that the relationship that exists between God and Jesus is extended to those who follow Jesus, including the listeners of Mark’s narrative. The communion that marks the relationship

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<sup>2</sup> Paul W. Meyer, ““The Father”: The Presentation of God in the Fourth Gospel,” in *Exploring the Gospel of John: In Honor of D. Moody Smith* (ed. R. A. Culpepper and C.C. Black ; Louisville: WJKP, 1996), 255.

between Jesus and God now marks the relationship between God and those who follow Jesus. The coming of God as ruler and Father is executed in the coming of the Spirit filled Son who, by the authority given to him by God, acts as God's envoy and presence on earth and extends covenantal relationship to those who follow him.

*Mark's God is the Authoritative Identifier of Jesus*

This, of course, is very closely related to what has just been stated. While the narrator is the first to identify Jesus as the Son of God, this designation serves as a foreshadowing of the divine proclamation in the baptism. Moreover, the second appearance of the divine φωνή in 9:7 reiterates this designation to the Markan audience, this time including certain disciples in its hearing. Jesus' own understanding of himself flows from these experiences, mainly the visionary experience in the baptism. His understanding of himself as the One sent from God, and as the Son of the vineyard owner, reflects God's identification of him in the baptism.

We might push this a bit further beyond identification to state that the authority of God is invested in Jesus, which is expressed in Mark by Jesus' own view of his commission. The very beginning of the narrative with God's sending of the divine messenger, John, before the one coming in the name of the Lord, Jesus, sets Jesus' ministry as one commissioned by the God of Israel. Moreover, as we pointed out, Jesus' understanding of himself as the one who has come and the one who has been sent, imply that his sending and commissioning come from God. The God of Mark is the authoritative signifier and commissioner of Jesus.

*Mark's God is Active in the Sufferings and Vindication of Jesus and Those Who Follow Jesus*

Mark's narrative, and the character of Jesus within the narrative, communicate both openly and subtly that, although the suffering and death of the beloved Son come at the hands of evil, God also plays an active role in this suffering. The use of the divine passive παραδίδωμι and the term δεῖ communicate both God's action in handing Jesus over, and the divine will that this must take place.



Moreover, Jesus' use of Zechariah 7 in Mark 14:27, and his changing of the original imperative verb to a future indicative, in which God becomes the "I" subject of "will strike," implicates God's activity in the suffering of the Son. The divine approval of this is narrated in the silence of the divine voice in the garden when Jesus prays for relief from this suffering.

But the suffering to be encountered by Jesus is not simply natural suffering of human existence, but suffering that comes as a result of doing the will of God. It is a righteous suffering brought onto Jesus because of his proclamation of the gospel of God. Like both John and Jesus, who are handed over for death for their proclamations, those who follow Jesus' ministry of being unashamed and faithful to the gospel of God, face the extreme possibility of suffering. Those who remain faithful to the gospel will be handed over. And like Jesus, their suffering is part and parcel of their faithfulness to God. God is active in the sufferings of Jesus and those who follow Jesus.

Mark's narrative, however, is not a tragedy for Jesus or those who follow him, for although the story holds out the possibility that suffering will come to those who proclaim the rule and gospel of God, the narrative also communicates that the faithful God of Jesus, who has raised and vindicated the Son, will indeed raise and vindicate those who are followers of the Son. Though great suffering will come upon the creation, the Creator will save those who have endured the persecution. The actions of God in raising Jesus from the dead foreshadow the actions God will carry out for those who are not ashamed of the gospel or the Son who gave his life for the gospel.

#### *Mark's God Dispels Evil and Those Who Oppose the Will of God*

The Son of God, immediately empowered by the Spirit of God at his baptism, runs full throttle into the evil characterised by σατάν in the temptation story, and into the "unclean spirits" throughout the narrative. This empowerment is combined with Jesus' announcement that the rule of God is at hand, signifying an end to the rule of Satan and the beginning of God's just rule on earth. Moreover, Jesus' actions of exorcism, miracles over nature, and healings serve to illustrate that this rule has

come, and that the evil that opposes God's will is dispelled. In his Spirit empowered challenge to the evil of the world, Jesus extends the true purity of God, and offers restorative hope to the marginalized and suffering of the world, while at the same time bringing an end to the rule of evil in the world.

But the dispelling of evil is not limited to evil that exists in a supernatural world.<sup>3</sup> Jesus also speaks plainly against humans that oppose God's will, and particularly those who do not recognize God's coming in the person of the Son. In setting themselves in opposition to Jesus, the religious leaders set themselves as opponents of God; their hearts are hardened against the will of God. These leaders demonstrate their power in the narrative world of Mark, power even to persuade the ruling government of Rome to execute Jesus.

However, Jesus makes it clear that their power is short-lived. The Messiah, who is David's Lord, will be exalted to the right hand of the Lord, and this Lord, that is God, will make the enemies of the Messiah the footstool of the Messiah. Moreover, Jesus' parable of the vineyard speaks of the tenants as the leaders of Israel who are in opposition to God's will, beating and killing the servants who have come to collect the land owner's share. The patience of the landowner is pushed to the limit, when, after sending the beloved Son, who is killed by the tenants, the landowner comes to destroy the tenants. The parable vividly pictures for the Markan audience the violence that God will bring upon evildoers, particularly those who reject the Son.

#### *Mark's God Establishes a New Covenant Community*

Jesus' calling of disciples to follow him begins the advancement of a counter community outside the religious establishment of Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup> The destruction of the tenants leaves a void, and the owner will give the vineyard to others. The calling of

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<sup>3</sup> James S. Hanson, *Endangered Promises: Conflict in Mark* (SBLDS 171; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2000), 155 notes that the presentation of the religious leaders, who are Jesus' opponents, as having "hardness of heart," aligns them with Satan.

<sup>4</sup> There is always the immediate danger in Mark that those called by Jesus will set their minds not on the things of God, but on human things. Thus there is always the danger that those called by Jesus will go over to the side of evil, and thus set themselves as opponents of the divine will, not unlike the religious leaders.

the twelve, and those who will follow because of the proclamation of the twelve, is a calling to be a part of this new community, a community of those who will inherit the vineyard. Yet Jesus' calling is not for the purpose of rebellious anarchy. Rather, he calls people to a new covenantal relationship with the God of Israel. Those who seek to be part of this new community are called to "do the will of God."

The symbolic entrance into this community, baptism, reflects Jesus' own baptism. The Markan audience finds association with this baptism as the beginning of a new way of life. The confirmation that God bestows on Jesus at his baptism, is bequeathed to all those who follow the Son of God. The πατήρ of Jesus becomes their πατήρ. The continuing affirmation of the community's existence takes place at the table, where the community gathers to share the meal cf. 14:22-25.<sup>5</sup> The table, unlike the temple, is open to those who are in need of forgiveness and hope.

This covenant community of God is also to be a community of prayer, expressing faith in God to do the impossible. Their faith is to be the kind of faith exhibited by Jesus, and their prayers to God are to be prefaced by forgiveness towards one another, and they are to lead to a resolve to do the will of God, despite the prospects of great persecution. Yet, even in their failure, hope is not forever lost, for the Jesus they follow has been faithful to follow the will of God, and the God of Jesus has been faithful to vindicate the persecuted Son. Though followers will fail, God's faithfulness and power in the world of the Markan audience does not.<sup>6</sup>

This faithful God of Mark is who calls followers out of the human realm to enter the realm of the divine, out of the kingdom of Satan and into the dynamic rule of God in a new covenant community. The dichotomy of human things versus divine things that is so prevalent in the Markan story is bridged by the actions of God in the activity of God's envoy and Son, and in forming a new covenant community in which God can be present. In God's will and activity in leading the Son to the cross,

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<sup>5</sup> The very fact that the early church practiced the sharing of the meal as a part of their worship most certainly must have been an affirmation of not only their communion with God, but also their communion with one another. See Larry W. Hurtado, *At the Origins of Christian Worship: The Context and Character of Early Christian Devotion* (Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 1999), 83-86.

<sup>6</sup> Lincoln, "Promise and Failure," 291-292.

the gap is closed between human and divine, and in the Son of Man, this Man, who is the Son of God, God's power to overcome the separation is unleashed.<sup>7</sup>

### **The God of Mark and the Authorial Audience**

In what sense then does the hearing of Mark's narrative convey the divine presence of God? And, if the narrative does convey the divine presence, what might this mean for the audience of Mark's story? These questions push us to consider the force of Mark's Gospel, and particularly the presentation of God in the narrative, on the audience of the first century. Much scholarly ink has been spilt on the discussion concerning the audience of Mark's narrative. Mostly arguments have revolved around finding either the geographical location and situation of an historical audience or the implied audience a modern interpreter gleans from the story itself. While both are legitimate pursuits, both begin at opposite ends of the question, yet are primarily dependent on the same story. Thus any hope of identifying the Markan audience must be dependent on Mark. We have no one to tell us what it was like to hear Mark's story, even though I have attempted to make a contribution to this in this work.

However, what we can say is that surely the Gospel of Mark was a story that was to be read aloud in order to cause a response from its audience. The sheer fact that the author tells this story in such dramatic fashion, using vivid language and imagery, and quick movement, leads us to consider how the audience is drawn into the narrative. Moreover, the vilification of certain characters, the exaltation of others, and the ambiguous presentation of still others, forces an audience of the narrative to judge these characters, and to emulate those worthy of emulation.

The upshot of enticing an audience into this story is that they see it as not just past recollections, but also as their own story. The stories of the past events in the life of Jesus and those he encountered are told not for nostalgic purposes, but to cause the audience to understand their own lives in relation to the story they are

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<sup>7</sup> These same points are made by Joel Marcus, "God on Earth in the New Testament," (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 24 November 2002).

hearing. The very fact that this story is told in their hearing lends credence to the idea that in some way, form, or fashion, their own story fits into the story Mark narrates, and at the same time the story of Mark's narrative fits into their own lives. As they engage with the complexities of the narrative as a temporal event, they engage with their own lives, processing how these stories can be meshed.

The privileged position of the audience, however, gives them a distinct advantage over the characters in the story, outside of Jesus, for they are able to know and see things that others cannot. They know the scheming trickery of the enemies of Jesus. They are able to comprehend the fullness of Jesus' divine mission to go to Jerusalem and be handed over for death. They are also able to process this mission as God's will and even God's action. But most importantly, other than the character Jesus and the narrator of the story, they alone know of the divine presence of God in and beyond the narrative.<sup>8</sup>

The audience also understands this story in the larger framework of Israel's story. They alone hear the voice from heaven proclaiming Jesus as the Divine Son in the baptism. While others question, "Who is this?" or "By what authority does he do these things?" the audience of Mark knows. They are present with Jesus in the garden as he, burdened by the coming suffering and death, prays to his God for relief, but receives none. And although the women are present at the tomb to hear the message of Jesus' resurrection, the audience is the only other character to experience this scene.

Their experience of this narrative is their experience of the God of this narrative. The narrative subtly draws the audience into the story, and into an experience of God through the telling of the story. The audience is forced to decide on whether they will be outsiders or insiders. Outsiders join with the evil of the world, and those who set themselves in opposition to God, while insiders are those

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<sup>8</sup> One exception to this lack of knowledge of God's presence is found in the scene of the transfiguration in which three of Jesus' disciples hear the voice of God. However, from their response, or lack thereof, these disciples seem not to demonstrate any sense of knowing God's presence, at least to the extent that should be expected. While it is true that the disciples recognize divine power and presence in and through Jesus, the ambiguous presentation of the disciples as understanding but not understanding, suggests that they do not fully perceive the divine presence of God in Jesus.

who do the will of God, primarily in their following of Jesus, and who face the persecutions associated with the gospel message with faith in the God who moves mountains, rolls away stones, and raises the dead. If Mark was written for a community under persecution, then the strength and hope they must gather to face these persecutions without failing is found in the God of Mark's narrative. But even if one cannot satisfactorily argue that Mark's historical community was under persecution, the narrative certainly does not hide the fact that those who choose to follow Jesus are faced with the great potential of being persecuted. In all times and places, then, the Markan narrative serves the faithful new covenant community who needs corrective teachings and further encouragement to remain faithful to the gospel of God lived and proclaimed in the coming of Jesus. As the disciples were confounded by their own incomprehension of who Jesus was, and confounded by their own human failures, so the Markan audience lives in the reality of human things and not divine things. But through hearing the narrative of Mark the Markan audience in all times and places experiences the continual divine presence communicated through the story and are able to fit this story into their own human existence, and equally their own human existence into this story.<sup>9</sup> The theology of Mark's Gospel is that the God who has created all things, and who is the God of Israel and the πατήρ of Jesus, is the God the Markan audience has experienced in the hearing of Mark's story, and is the God who is present with them as they seek to do the will of God in a fallen and evil world, where, despite their failures and the persecutions that persist in deterring the movement of God's rule and the proclamation of God's gospel, God will remain forever faithful. "Οὐκ ἔστιν θεὸς νεκρῶν ἀλλὰ ζώντων."

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<sup>9</sup> Hanson (*The Endangered Promises*, 254) fittingly remarks, "The rhetorical effectiveness of Mark's narrative lies in its willingness to bring its audience to an experience both of the world as it really is—with all that endangers God's promise of a future—and the world as it ought to be, transformed by the affirmation of God's promise of redemption, and its ability to transform fearful, unfaithful disciples into agents of that redemption." In terms similar to that offered by Peter Berger Mark's narrative is theologically community-construction and community-maintenance (*The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* [New York: Doubleday, 1967]).



### Contributions to Markan Scholarship

This thesis has sought to answer Dahl's appeal to tend to the "neglected factor" in New Testament studies, albeit only in relation to Mark's Gospel. Adopting a literary, close reading perspective from the stance of a listening authorial audience, this thesis has taken painstaking steps to draw out the characterisation of God from the narrative. The purpose has not been for removing God from the narrative, but to demonstrate that God plays a vital and irreplaceable role in the story, and the story would not exist apart from the presentation of God. The story begins and ends with the actions of God, and that which takes place in the middle of the story also involves the will and actions of God in/through the one proclaimed by the narrative as Son of God, Jesus. Thus, as this thesis has demonstrated, Mark's narrative is as much a *theo*-logical narrative as it is a christological narrative, for it has as much to say to its audience about God as it does about Jesus.

While attempting to maintain a reading of the narrative within its original social, cultural, and religious milieu, this thesis indirectly challenges historical critical readings of the narrative that have focused primarily on the situation and location of a Markan audience as the motivation for the narrative, and has offered a theological reading, focused primarily on God as the impetus and main character of the narrative. Certainly it is the story of Jesus that gives the purpose for the narrative of Mark coming into existence, but due to the way that the story is narrated, the existence of Mark's story of Jesus is dependent on God's past promises to Israel, and on God's present and continuous action in the world, including the present of the listening audience. The narrative interprets the life of Jesus as God's action.

Furthermore, although endeavouring to understand the Christology of the narrative within the framework of concepts and designations recognizable to a first century audience, this thesis has demonstrated that the presentation of Jesus in Mark is better understood as an aspect of the narrative's presentation of God. In "re-presenting" the God of Israel through a narrative that is concerned with telling the story of Jesus, the narrative of Mark clearly presents this Jesus as related, quite closely related, to the God of Israel. Again, though separate in the narrative, i.e. Jesus is human and God is not, there exists a very high degree of inseparability. A

Markan audience would certainly comprehend the significance of the Markan Jesus as embedded in his relationship to God, and apart from God, the Markan Jesus has no significance. While other studies of Mark have sought to understand the narrative's Christology through titles used in reference to Jesus, through hypotheses concerning the situation of the Markan community, and by way of comparison to the *theios aner* theory, this thesis has proposed that Christology is better understood in congruence with and as an aspect of Markan theology proper.

Additionally, although the narrative begins with God as its subject, and I have indirectly challenged the assumption of historical criticism, that Mark addresses problems, either internal or external, in a Markan community, this has not prevented a somewhat existential reading of the narrative. Yet again, this thesis is a re-reading of the narrative's presentation of discipleship in terms of the presentation of God. While certainly discipleship is being faithful to Jesus, the overall thrust of the narrative points to faithfulness to God through following the paradigm of Jesus as the essence of living in the dynamic rule of God. Certainly the first century audience of Mark was facing challenges, problems, and possibly persecution. To all these Mark's narrative may have answers. But this thesis has attempted to turn the conversation somewhat around by not looking for problems that Mark's narrative might have answered, but by looking for answers that might address a variety of problems in a first century audience of Mark. In other words, instead of proposing that Mark's narrative grew out of a need to give encouragement in the midst of persecution, or out of a need to correct a misguided Christology in the Markan community, this thesis has proposed that Mark's narrative grew out of the need to "re-present" the actions of God via the coming of Jesus, and a need to redefine the community of God.<sup>10</sup>

By narrating this Gospel, the author of Mark proclaims the good news of God that has come in the person of God's beloved Son, who acts and speaks on behalf of

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<sup>10</sup> I realise that I am making a historical judgment that has as much grounding as those hypotheses against which I am arguing. My intention is not necessarily to make such broad historical claims about the impetus of Mark's narrative. However, if I stand on my thesis that the narrative is primarily concerned to say something about God, then it seems only reasonable that a position on the historical origins of the Markan narrative must cohere with this thesis.

God, and who calls a new community of people to follow him as an act of doing the will of God. This narrative proclamation presents any audience of Mark, first or twenty-first century, with the assurance that the God who has fulfilled the promises of the past, will indeed be at hand in the present, and offers hope for a new future in the rule of God.

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